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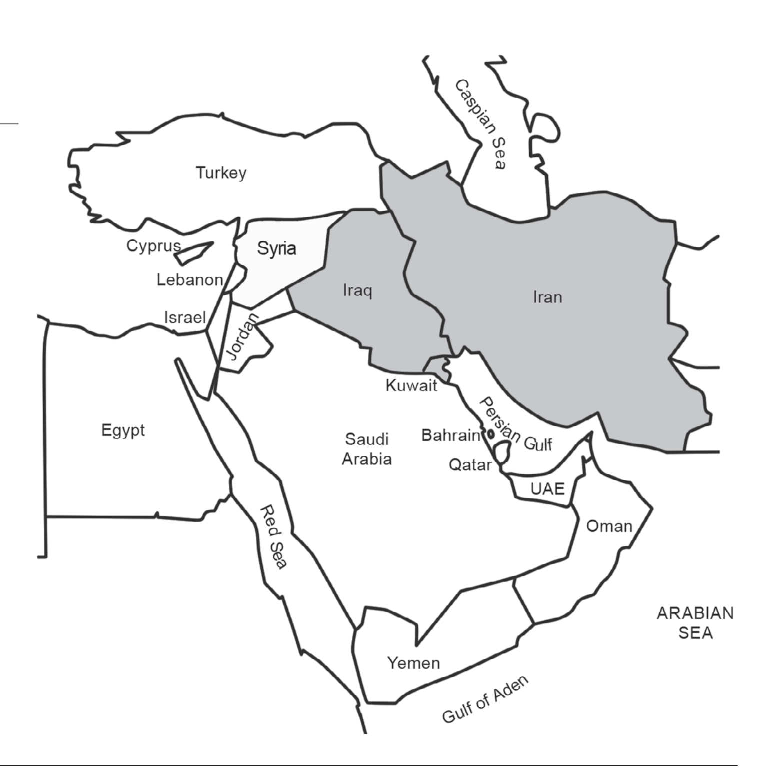
LEBANESE CIVIL WAR

VOLUME 1: PALESTINIAN DIASPORA, SYRIAN AND ISRAELI INTERVENTIONS, 1970–1978

Tom Cooper & Sergio Santana



CONTENTS



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NOTE

In order to simplify the use of this book, all names, locations and geographic designations are as provided in The Times World Atlas, or other traditionally accepted major sources of reference, as of the time of the described events. Similarly, Arabic names are Romanised and transcripted rather than transliterated. For example: the definite article al- before words starting with 'sun letters' is given as pronounced instead of simply as al- (which is the usual practice for non-Arabic speakers in most English-language literature and media). Because ranges are measured in feet and nautical miles in international aeronautics, all the ranges and measurements cited in this book are provided in both metric and imperial measurements.

ABBREVIATIONS

AAA anti-aircraft artillery
AAM air-to-air missile
AB air base
AEW airborne early warning
An Antonov (the design bureau led by Oleg Antonov)
APC Armoured Personnel Carrier
AMAL Lebanese Resistance Regiments
ANO Abu Nidal Organisation
AFL Army of Free Lebanon
ALA Armée du Liban Arabe (also LAA)
AMAN Agaf HaModi'in (Israeli military intelligence service)
ALF Arab Liberation Front
ASCC Air Standardisation Coordinating Committee
ATGM Anti-Tank Guided Missile
ATMS automated tactical management system
AWACS airborne early warning and control system
BOAC British Overseas Airways Corporation
BVR beyond visual range
CAP Combat Air Patrol
CAS Close Air Support
CIA Central Intelligence Agency
CBU Cluster Bomb Unit
COMINT communications intelligence
DFLP Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine
DMZ De-Militarized Zone
CO commanding officer
COIN counter-insurgency
COMINT communications intelligence
ECM electronic countermeasures
ECCM electronic counter-countermeasures
EAF Egyptian Air Force (official designation since 1972)
ELINT electronic intelligence
FAL Force Aérienne Libanaise (Lebanese Air Force)
FLIR Forward Looking Infrared
GP general-purpose (bomb)
GBP Great Britain Pound
HE high-explosive
HOT Hautsubsonique Optiquement Téleguidé Tiré d'un Tube (High-subsonic Optical Remote Guided fired from a Tube – French-built ATGM)
HQ Headquarters
IADS integrated air defence system
IAI Israeli Aircraft Industries
IAP international airport
IDF Israeli Defence Force
IDF/AF Israeli Defence Force/Air Force
IrAF Iraqi Air Force (official designation since 1958)
IRST Infrared Search and Track
Il Ilyushin (the design bureau led by Sergey Vladimirovich Ilyushin, also known as OKB-39)
KGB Komitet Gosudarstvennoy Bezopasnost (Soviet Committee for State Security)
KLM Koninklijke Luchtvaart Maatschappij (Royal Dutch Airlines)
KRF Kataeb Regulatory Forces
LAA Lebanese Arab Army
LIA Lebanese International Airways
LOROP long-range oblique photography
MANPAD man-portable air defence system
MBT Main Battle Tank
MEA Middle East Airlines
MiG Mikoyan i Gurevich (the design bureau led by Artyom Ivanovich Mikoyan and Mikhail Iosifovich Gurevich, also known as OKB-155 or MMZ 'Zenit')
MRAAM medium range air-to-air missile
NATO North Atlantic Treaty Organisation
nav/attack navigational and attack (avionics suite)
NCO Non-Commissioned Officer
NLP National Liberal Party
NWC National Water Carrier (Israel)
OCU Operational Conversion Unit
OKB Opytno-Konstrooktorskoye Byuro (design bureau)
OTU Operational Training Unit
PBG Palestinian Border Guard
PDLFP Popular Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine
PFLP Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine
PFLP-GC Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine – General Command
PGM Precision Guided Munition
PLA Palestinian Liberation Army
PLO Palestine Liberation Organisation
POW prisoner of war
PPLO Palestine Popular Liberation Organization
PPSF Palestinian Popular Struggle Front, a militant Palestinian organisation
PVO Protivovozdushnaya Oborona Strany (Soviet Air Defence Force)
RAF Royal Air Force (of the United Kingdom)
RHAW radar homing and warning (system)
RJAF Royal Jordanian Air Force
RPG Ruchnoy Protivotankoviy Granatomyot (Hand-held anti-tank grenade launcher)
RPV Remote Piloted Vehicle
RWR radar warning receiver
SAD Defence Companies (Syria, predecessors to the Republican Guards Division)
SAIQA Vanguard of the Liberation War
SAM surface-to-air missile
SAR search and rescue
SEAD Suppression of Enemy Air Defence
SIGINT signals intelligence
SLA South Lebanon Army
SLAR Side Looking Airborne Radar
SNECMA Société Nationale d'Étude et de Construction de Moteurs d'Aviation (French Aviation Engines Manufacturer)
SPAAG Self Propelled Anti Aircraft Gun
Sqn squadron
SS Schultz Sttafel (Protection Squadron)
SSNP Syrian Socialist Nationalist Party
STUG Aus FG Sturmgeschütz (self-propelled assault guns)
Su Sukhoi (the design bureau led by Pavel Ossipovich Sukhoi, also known as OKB-51)

SyAA	Syrian Arab Army
SyAAF	Syrian Arab Air Force
SyAADF	Syrian Arab Air Defence Force
TACAN	Tactical Air Navigation
TWA	Trans World Airways
UN	United Nations
UNEF	United Nations Emergency Force
UNIFIL	United Nations Force in Lebanon
UNTSO	United Nations Truce Supervision Organisation
UNRWA	United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East
UAE	United Arab Emirates
UAR	United Arab Republic
UARAF	United Arab Republic Air Force
USAF	United States Air Force
USN	US Navy
USSR	Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (also 'Soviet Union')
VG	variable geometry (wing)
VTOL	vertical takeoff and landing
VVS	Voyenno-Vozdushnye Sily (Soviet Air Force)
ZLA	Zgharta Liberation Army

INTRODUCTION AND ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

On 6 June 1982, Israel launched what was publicly declared a limited operation to force the Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO) away from Israel's northern border. Israel thus not only became involved in a civil war that had been raging in Lebanon since 1975, but was embroiled in a multi-facetted conflict that – with few interruptions in between – is de-facto raging until this very day.

The majority of published histories of this war are relatively easy to summarise: most start with France releasing Lebanon into independence, in 1943, and focus on the combat operations of the Israeli Defence Force (IDF) between 6 and 12 June 1982. They discuss the dramatic relations between a number of highly charged issues related to an entire historical, religious, and political labyrinth surrounding Israel's decision to invade the country, or compress the picture to what is widely perceived as a spectacular aerial engagement that took place early during the conflict. It is generally accepted that the Israel Defence Force/Air Force (IDF/AF) scored a startling success against Syrian surface-to-air missiles (SAMs), and then went on to shoot down a huge number of enemy aircraft in one of the biggest aerial battles in history, before – more or less easily – defeating the Syrian armed forces on the ground, and expelling the militants of the PLO out of Lebanon.[1] The 'Beka'a Valley success' is especially widely studied as the moment in which modern airpower took a dramatic leap forward – if it not the moment it was outright born. At least it was a 'turning point in the deadly duel of fighters and SAMs. In some cases, descriptions culminate in outright odes stressing that no operation in the history of air warfare stands comparison. Another characteristic of the majority of the available accounts of this – one – episode from the long Lebanese Civil War (fought 1975-1990) is at least as common: except for in Israel – where the related coverage is usually dominated by detailed descriptions of actions by Israel's contemporary Minister of Defence, Ariel Sharon – Western military histories describe the Israeli invasion of Lebanon as caused by 'terrorism' exercised by the PLO against Israel, and Israel's need to force the organisation out of Lebanon. Almost unilaterally, Syria is blamed for the military occupation of Lebanon, for regarding the country as part of a 'Greater Syria' and constantly seeking to manipulate Lebanese politics, while the – supposedly – poor performance of its armed forces is either described as due to a culture of utter military incompetence, chaos, and defeatism, or a failed attempt to apply the Soviet doctrine of warfare. Moreover, not only do the majority of Western academic studies of this conflict start only with the creation of the French Mandate over Lebanon: foremost popular histories usually set its starting point either with Lebanese independence in 1943, or the assassination of Israel's ambassador to Great Britain on 3 June 1982 – as if there was nothing existing in this part of the world before, in between, or after, or as if the Palestinian refugees expelled from Israel in 1948 fled at their own device, and then had nothing better to do but to cause problems for the local governments. Finally, next to no attention is paid to the reasons for an entire series of – often sharp – defeats of the Syrian armed forces in the period 1982-1985.

If the Israeli and Western histories of this conflict are as blurred, this is even more valid for the Arab histories and the histories published in Eastern Europe. The official Syrian version – and so far only one related book and a handful of related articles have ever been officially issued – is a story of political intrigues, treacheries, and conspiracies; the military aspects are either not at all, or barely worth, mention. Similarly, the former Soviet-, and modern-day Russian-language histories exclusively concentrate on whitewashing an obvious military defeat, while entirely ignoring not only the politics, but plenty of facts – and sometimes most of reality, too.

Overall, the conclusion is unavoidable that the most striking fact about the published military history of Lebanon in 1982 is the same as that of the military history of Palestine and Syria since Neolithic ages, but especially 1916, Israel since 1947, Lebanon since 1975, and then Syria since 2011: that this is a story of an endless amount of published closed-mindedness. On its own, this is little surprising: the reason is that the majority of related topics are heavily charged – foremost with religion-based issues and endless amounts of related myths, legends, prejudices and predilections. Indeed, the public of every single one of the all the diverse (directly or indirectly) involved parties is consistently fed the 'generally accepted', 'official party-line' version, each of which always emphasises the party in question as being the 'angles': as the party about which there can be no questions, no conditions, no mitigating factors, nothing to question or criticise, just the 'good guys' in a never-ending struggle against the 'bad guys'. Therefore, whichever version even a casual bystander picks, the decision is certainly going to make the person nothing less than despicable in the eyes of all the other parties.

The most neutral observers might therefore try opting for the conclusion that there is never going to be one true version of what happened and why in Lebanon in the period of June – August 1982. The authors of this volume represent the standpoint that there very much is one: we represent the standpoint that wars and warfare are not only systems on their own, but also part of larger systems that make our society. None of this can be understood if studied in isolation, but it turns out to be rather easier to understand and explain within its historic, geo-political and socio-economic context. Furthermore, the devil is in the detail, as some say, and nowhere is this as valid as in a modern war, or the conflict between Arabs and the Israelis. This is why we have decided to take a closer look not only at the history of the area before 1982, but especially at specific military branches, weapons systems, combat operations and related experiences during the decade before 1982. After all, the Palestinian refugees and militants did not 'suddenly appear' in Lebanon, as often explained, nor were they alone to blame for the de-facto dissolution

of this country in the 1970s. This should not mean that our version is something like the *only* truth: but, it is a version that avoids the omni-present generalisations, white-washing of actions by one or the other of the involved parties, and the preposterous – frequently racist, and certainly patronising – style in which the story of the Israeli invasion of Lebanon in 1982 is usually told.

While our related research began back on the beautiful sunny morning of 7 June 1982 – the day contemporary media and daily newspapers in particular began reports and reactions to the Israeli invasion of Lebanon – it has really only developed since the late 1990s, thanks to the availability of the internet. This enabled us to establish and maintain ties to a wide range of well-positioned contacts in the Middle East, but also elsewhere around the world, the knowledge and insights of which have heavily influenced this account. Foremost amongst these are numerous active or retired military officers of the Israeli, Iraqi, Lebanese and Syrian armed forces that have selflessly provided help and advice over the years, often under difficult circumstances. Indeed, for reasons related to their and the safety of their families, we have agreed to reference to them in form of code-names in this narrative. Still, their information actually forms the backbone of this project, and there is no way to express enough gratitude to any of them.

Furthermore, we would like to express our special thanks to a number of colleagues for their kind help. Foremost amongst them is Marcos 'Pit' Viniegra, from Venezuela, who – sadly – passed away in February 2018. His unique insights into the little known aspects of Soviet military thinking have strongly influenced our related research. Albert Grandolini from France has supported this project for more than a decade through providing an extensive collection of information and photographs. Vatche Mitilian, Cesar Jachan, and Samir Kassis from Lebanon have helped us by sharing their extensive research about the Lebanese armed forces, and Ali Tobchi from Iraq has helped immensely with details from his own documentation, and translations from Arabic. Nour Bardai and Dr Abdallah Emran helped in similar fashion when it came to Egypt. Jean-Marie Langeron from France, and Tomislav Mesaric from Croatia have helped immensely with their studies of Soviet-made combat aircraft and integrated air defence systems; Jeroen Nijmeijer and Menno van der Wall from The Netherlands have helped with details on Soviet-made aircraft and the Syrian order of battle, respectively; Martin Smisek from the Czech Republic has provided precious documentation from local military archives and plentiful advice; while Pit Weintert from Germany has helped with additional information and photographs. Finally, we cannot express enough gratitude to Hicham Honeini, from Lebanon, for his endless patience while helping with the translations of various publications and documentation in Arabic, while David Nicolle from Great Britain, and Doug Dildy from the USA remain sources of encouragement and inspiration for my work, as well as additional information and photography.

CHAPTER 1
THE SHAM

It appears all too easy to say that there is no sense in trying to understand the Arab-Israeli conflict, and thus also what happened in Lebanon in 1982: indeed, to downplay all of the related affairs as something like the result of one or more ages-old feud. Actually, there are very few other conflicts as rational as the one between Arabs and Israel – and even fewer that are of more recent origins. Nevertheless, due to the direct involvement and interest of three major religions – and an entire host of related sects – and a wide range of private and commercial interests, the history of the Middle East is loaded with unsubstantiated myths and hatred to a point where reality is nearly unrecognizable – unless one insists on empirically supported facts. The latter deliver very clear definitions of what is the Middle East, what is Palestine, what is Israel, what is Syria and what is Lebanon, and how Israel came to invade Lebanon in 1982.[1]

GEOGRAPHY

The area nowadays within Israel, Lebanon and Syria can be distributed into three sectors: the narrow coastal plains; the mountain chains stretching from the an-Nassiriyah Mountains in north-western Syria in the north, Mount Lebanon in the centre, the Anti-Lebanon Mountains – with Lebanon's highest peak Qurnat as-Sawda (2,088m/10,131ft) – to Galilee, Samaria and Judea in the south. Further east are the valleys of the Orontes River in the north and the Jordan River in the south, with elevations ranging down to 408m (1,340ft) below the sea level, on the shores of the Dead Sea in the south.

The mountainous Galilee dominates the northern section of Israel, extending for about 40 kilometres (25 miles) from the Mediterranean Sea to Lake Tiberias (the Sea of Galilee). Mount Meron – at 1,208m (3,963ft) the highest point in Israel – is in the centre of this area, further south of which is the Plain of Jezreel, a densely populated agricultural region some 55km (35 miles) long and 25km (15 miles) wide between Haifa in the west and the Jordan River in the east.

The climate is typical of that of the Mediterranean with cool, rainy winters, and hot, dry summers. Temperatures vary considerably with elevation, exposure to the sea, and predominant winds: Jerusalem, for example, averages 9°C (48°F) in January, and 24°C (75°F) in August, while Beirut and Haifa average 12°C (54°F) in January and 27°C (80°F) in summer. Frost occurs a few days a year in the lower regions, while heavy snow lingers atop mountain peaks well into April and May. The Beka'a Valley and the Anti-Lebanon Mountains are situated in the rain shadow of the Lebanon Mountains and thus have hot, dry summers and cold winters with only occasional rain.

Except in Lebanon, water is scarce and mostly comes from rainfall, between November and February, with total amounts decreasing from north to south and from west to east. Lebanon has no navigable rivers or major lakes, but springs in the Beka'a fill the Litani River that flows south and the Orontes River that flows north into the Orontes River Valley within what is present day Syria. Combined with runoff from melting snow, these sources provide Lebanon with a plentiful supply of water – unique in the Middle East. The principal aquifer of Israel used to be the Jordan River, an unnavigable stream flowing through Lake Tiberias and emptying into the Dead Sea: since 1967, its water is matched by that from the Golan Heights and underground springs of the West Bank.

Scarcity of water and millennia of human population resulted in the disappearance of the original evergreen forests. Hailed in the Bible and other works of ancient literature, and officially protected in modern times, the cedar tree that decorates Lebanon's national flag barely survives within a few small stands in the mountains. Despite a reforestation program in the hilly regions, and productive soils in Lebanon and northern Israel, the number of diverse plants was reduced to about 2,500 species of predominantly agricultural products, including citrus fruits, bananas, cotton, tobacco, grapes, figs and olives. Animal life suffered in similar fashion with bigger mammals like wild boars, gazelles, ibexes, jackals, hyenas, wildcats

and badgers nowadays being reduced to southern Israel. Fewer than 380 species of birds remain, about 100 of which migrate seasonally to other areas, usually through the Beka'a Valley towards the north in spring, and the same way back towards the south in autumn. Israel and Lebanon, as well as western Syria, have experienced rapid population growth and industrialisation over the last 100 years, with serious air and water pollution, followed by problems related to disposing of waste.

HISTORY

Archaeological evidence has dated the earliest traces of human inhabitation in the Middle East to around 600,000 BC. In the Neolithic period, about 14,500 years ago, Natufians – ancestors of what are nowadays known as 'Arabs' but also a part of the population of Israel – began domesticating sheep, oxen and goats, and experimenting with farming in areas of present day Iraq, Iran, and Turkey. As they domesticated animals, they domesticated themselves: they began cultivating cereals, baking bread, brewing beer, and founding settlements in the area between modern-day Haifa in Israel and Shubayqa in Jordan. As they learned that by living in groups it was easier to specialise and trade their products instead of producing everything on their own, they began developing the first trade centres. One of the oldest known trading centres is Jericho: nowadays a town in central West Bank, it was populated by Natufians at least 11,000 years ago and is widely considered as the oldest continuously inhabited place in the world – followed by the port town of Byblos and Damascus. Indeed, around 7,000 years ago, the citizens of Jericho constructed a defensive wall and then a road connecting them to Byblos. The area in between the three towns prospered more rapidly than any other and was densely inhabited around 6,500 years ago, when local chiefs began leading colonies out of the hills to settle on the fertile plains between the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers further east. The land won by draining of marshes and watering from the two giant water courses became known as Sumer and bloomed around 5,300 years ago, becoming the oldest known civilisation.

While Sumerian priests ran the country, invented writing and opened the first known schools, merchants traded with people from the neighbourhood: some of their best customers became the Egyptians, people united by King Menes around 3,000 BC. Thanks to commerce between Egypt and India, around 4,000 years ago, Ur (present day Tel el-Muqejjir, in Iraq) grew into the huge and wealthy capital of Sumer. However, the Sumerians also began fighting wars – usually over water and taxation, and sometimes against foreign invaders. Around 2,000 BC, Sumer was weakened by the Amorites, desert nomads of Semitic origin, and Ur was sacked by its arch-enemy, the Elamites, who then quickly withdrew. As the Amorites took over, they grew civilized and translated the Sumerian religion into their own language (Akkadian), eventually growing into the Assyrian Empire.

LAND OF PURPLE

Meanwhile, Egypt flourished, providing its population with a luxury life foreign to the Sumerians – as obvious in opulent architecture immortalised by such constructions as the giant pyramid of King Khufu (better known by the Greek version of his name: Cheops). The situation reached a point where when the barbarian Hyksos warriors mounted in horse-drawn chariots invaded, in 1780 BC, the Egyptians were spooked into giving up without a fight. The Hyksos remained in charge for 200 years, until Ahmose, a Baron of Thebes, liberated the country: his successor, Amenhotep I was the first ruler to establish and maintain a modern standing army, capable of projecting Pharaoh's power at home and abroad. A few centuries later, in around 1370 BC, pharaoh Amenothep IV (who subsequently renamed himself Akhenaton) then decided to announce there was only one God, causing a period of fierce internal revolts. His son, TutAnkhaton, restored the old religion, but died early: following the age old peacekeeping formula, his widow then married a prince of the Hittite Empire, centred in modern-day Turkey. However, this 'foreigner' was murdered by the Egyptians, prompting the Hittites to send an army southwards, causing a number of anti-Egyptian revolts as it went. Fought mostly within the areas currently distributed between Lebanon, Syria and Jordan, the resulting war raged for 60 years until a young pharaoh calling himself Ramses the Great stabilised his empire and signed a peace treaty with the Hittites – the first ever in the history of humankind – in 1258 BC.

What followed was an era of unprecedented international contact and commerce. Positioned along major trade routes between Egypt in the west, Babylonia in the east, the Hittite Empire in the north, the Achaeans (distant cousins of the Hyksos, who settled in Greece) in the north-west, and Crete, the area in between experienced a period of unlimited growth: not only Byblos, or the 6,000-year-old Ugarit, but slightly younger Sidon, Beirut, Tyre and the rapidly growing port of Gaza all developed into famed city-states. The precious purple dye sold by their merchants gave the land one of its many names, Canaan – 'land of purple' – in the Ugaritic language.

The booming economy of the eastern Mediterranean attracted a growing immigration of the Semites from the Arabian Peninsula until 1225 BC, when Ramses the Great died and the pharaohs retreated from international politics. The resulting vacuum was exploited by the Dorians (subsequently the Spartans) from the north, the conquests of which shattered the local civilisations. Whole tribes of the Canaanites took to the sea. After being repulsed by Ramses III of Egypt, they returned to partially re-conquer and partially merge into the local population. While the resulting Israelites – as the population of southern Canaan became known around 1200 BC – established their first unified kingdom in around 1020 BC, this foremost excelled at religious intolerance that rejected quite a few original local institutions (like personal wealth, horses, chariots, arts, or anyone else's religion). Following numerous uprisings and several wars, the Kingdom of Israel was split in 928-922 BC, and then destroyed by the Assyrians in 721 BC. In around 500 BC, the survivors developed the ancient Israelite religion, one of the oldest monotheist religions, and have ever since been referred to as 'Jews'.

Returning to their merchant heritage the northern Canaanites began thriving again. Colloquially known as the Phoenicians, they developed the first alphabet in Ugarit, and – after mastering the art of navigation – dominated the Mediterranean Sea trade for the next 1,000 years, easily adjusting to successive conquering Assyrians (867 BC), Babylonians (590 BC), Persians (538 BC), and Greeks under Alexander the Great (333 BC), the Ptolemes and the Selucids. Finally, the tribal nomadic people living further inland and first named 'Arabs' in around 950 BC, either continued exercising control over the major commerce routes towards the east and south, or minded their own business.

Unsurprisingly, considering all the coming and going, the part of what is nowadays the Middle East along the eastern coast of the Mediterranean Sea became known by many names. Referring to the heavy snow in its mountains, the Semites called the northern area *laban*, meaning 'white'; some Greek writers called it *Palestine*, others – and some of the locals – *Syria*, and yet others *Sham* (after a Semitic sky-god Bellsham in Canaan/Phoenicia and ancient Palmyra, and as

'heaven' or 'sky').

An independent Jewish state was established in 165 BC, but was overrun by the Roman Empire in 63 and 64 BC. The Romans remained in power for more than 570 years, greatly influencing the regional culture. Initially, they administered the area as *Syria Palaestina* and *Judea*: following multiple Jewish revolts and a conflict with the short-lived Palmyrene Empire, this wealthy area gained crucial strategic importance in the 3rd Century, and its temples and such institutions as the School of Law in Beirut thrived until being destroyed by earthquakes. During the 1st Century of the modern era, another monotheistic religion emerged in Judea in the form of a sect that departed from Jewish customs: Christianity. Originally practiced in secret, it was eventually declared the official religion of the Roman Empire in 330, and then experienced an advance deep into the Arabian Desert during the Byzantine period that lasted until 640.

RISE OF ISLAM

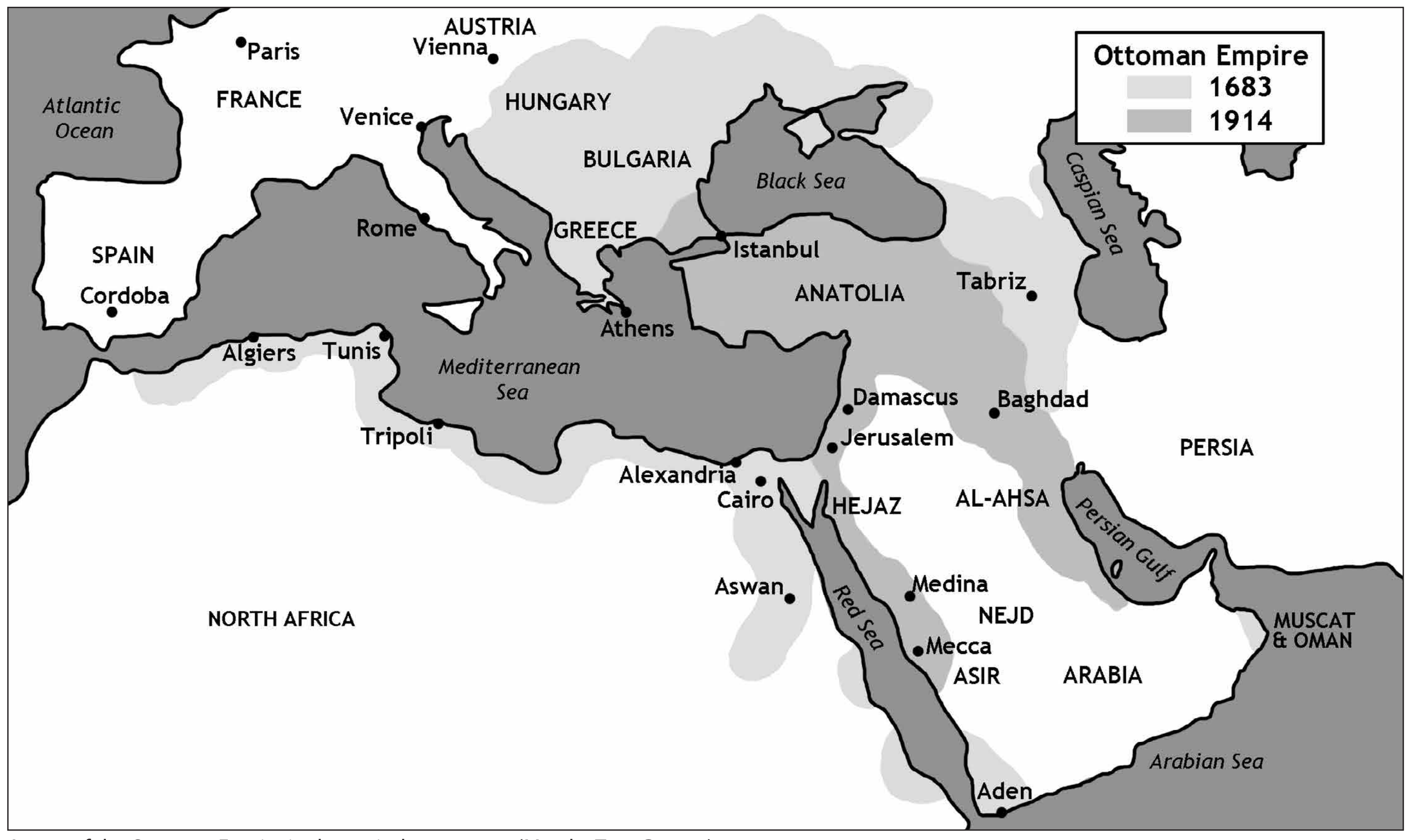
In 613, Muhammad, a merchant from the poor but respected clan of Hashim from Mecca, began speaking out in the public, demanding that the Arabs become one people with one God – essentially the same God that Christians and Jews already believed in. As the population reacted with a boycott of the entire Hashim clan and threatened Muhammad's life, he fled to Medina in 622. Over the following years, he attracted enough followers to return with an army of 10,000 and secure Mecca. Muhammed died two years later, but his religion survived. Over the next 12 years its warriors quickly beat the Byzantines, usually because they were weakened by the resistance of local Christians to their oppression and high taxes: for example, fleeing from the Byzantines, the Maronite Christians settled in the mountainous area known as Mount Lebanon. Through 634-638, the forces of Islam secured all the former Roman provinces of Palestine, Syria and Egypt: indeed, they converted Palestine into the centre of the Islamic world in 691, following the completion of the Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem. Less than 50 years later, Islam controlled an empire stretching from Spain to China – sparking the golden age of Arab, and also Jewish, civilisation. Amazed at what they found in the countries they conquered, the Arabs borrowed, imitated and stole every idea they came across, including Hellenistic thoughts, Byzantine traditions, Roman law, Syrian scholarship, and Persian arts: the great Arab cities – Baghdad, Basra, Cairo, Damascus and Cordoba – became intellectual centres of the world, producing the finest scientists, doctors, mathematicians, architects, philosophers and poets. In turn, their texts were translated into Latin, subsequently having an enormous impact upon Europe, where they prompted the Renaissance.

The golden age of the caliphates was disturbed by internal divisions and then a series of invasions. Like Christianity, split into the Oriental Orthodoxy in 451, and then into the Eastern Orthodox Church and the Catholic Church in 1054, arch-rivalry between the successive Umayyad, Abbasid and Fatimid dynasties and the schism in Islam split the followers into the orthodox Sunni, the dissident Shi'a, and a number of smaller sects. Fearful of persecution, especially the Ismailite Druze and Alawites found refuge in the same mountains where the Maronite Christians were already hiding. On the plains east of them, internal differences opened the way for conquest by the Turko-Persian Seljuq Empire. Damascus fell in 1063, and Jerusalem in 1073. The appearance of the Seljuqs alarmed the Byzantines to a degree where they requested help from the Pope, the ex officio leader of the Roman Catholic Church in Rome – with unimaginable consequences: in 1095, the latter called for a Crusade to 'save Jerusalem'. The First Crusade resulted in the quick conquest, pillage and wholesale massacre of the Muslim, Jewish and Christian population of much of the Minor Asia in 1098, and then Jerusalem in 1099. Contrary to the wishes of the Byzantines, the Crusaders established four states in the Middle East: the County of Edessa, the Principality of Antioch, the County of Tripoli, and the Kingdom of Jerusalem. In 1144, the County of Edessa fell to the forces of the Turkish atabeg Imad ad-Din Zengi, who managed to unify Syria but failed to secure Egypt before turning against the Crusaders. Zengi's successor, an-Nasir Salah ad-Din Yusuf ibn Ayyub – a Sunni Muslim of Kurdish origin better known as Salah ad-Din or Saladin – managed both feats and more: after securing Egypt, he unified the Muslims and recovered Jerusalem in 1187. Although thus prompting the Third Crusade (that recovered Acre but failed to recover Jerusalem) Saladin earned himself a great reputation in Europe as a chivalrous knight and a generous enemy: in 1192, he finalized the Treaty of Jaffa, which granted Muslim control over Jerusalem, but allowed unarmed Christian pilgrims and merchants to visit the city for a period of three years.

Two out of seven additional Crusades resulted in the Christians re-establishing themselves in control of Jerusalem, from 1229 until 1244: however, they also ruined the remnants of the Byzantine Empire and Seljuk possessions to a degree where this opened the way for a Mongol invasion and the wholesale destruction of Aleppo, Damascus and large parts of Palestine in 1260. The Mamluk Sultan az-Zaher Baibars led his army from Egypt to defeat the Mongols – and then the Ninth Crusade, too – before destroying the remaining Crusader states along the Mediterranean coast and recovering the ruined Damascus, in the period 1268-1271. He thus earned himself the status of a national hero in Egypt, Syria, and in Kazakhstan until this very day. The last Crusader strongholds of Tyre, Beirut and Sidon surrendered to the forces of Sultan al-Ashraf Khalil, in 1291, but Baibars' and Khalil's successors then lost the decades-long struggle with the expanding Ottoman Empire: Syria and Egypt fell to the latter in 1512-1520, and the Ottomans then pushed their conquests all the way to Algeria, into the Red Sea and the Persian Gulf.

THE AGE OF THE OTTOMANS

For the next 400 years, the Ottomans exercised control over all of the Middle East, including Palestine – widely considered as the 'Holy Land' by the Jews, Christians and Muslims alike. Unsurprisingly, the Ottoman administration followed a system of peaceful coexistence in which Damascus served as a capital of Sham (including the modern-day Lebanon and Palestine), in which every ethno-religious minority – Arab Shi'a Muslims, Arab Sunni Muslims, diverse Christian sects, Armenians, Kurds and Jews – constituted a *millet*, its own community. In this way, not only the Maronite Christians but also the Shi'a and the Druze survived in the Beka'a Valley and the Shouf mountains, respectively, but this is also the principal reason why the area nowadays within Israel, Lebanon, and Syria was re-populated by such a diverse mix of ethno-religious groups. Indeed, the Ottomans granted considerable autonomy to Lebanon, which was ruled by two Druze dynasties for centuries. Supported by the Maronites, the Druze prince Fakhr ad-Din of the Ma'ani family ruled from 1591 to 1633, extending his authority from the mountains to the south and east. The Ottomans intervened only once they became suspicious about Fakhr ad-Din's well-organized and centralized power-base – and his ties to European courts: in 1633, he was defeated by a Turkish military expedition, taken to Istanbul, and executed two years later.



A map of the Ottoman Empire in the period 1683-1914. (Map by Tom Cooper)

Lebanon subsequently went through a period of internal strife and political instability as the Shi'a revolted and cut their ties to the Druze-Maronite alliance on Mount Lebanon, while the Sunnis began challenging the authority of the princes. Anarchy and chaos spread, driving thousands of Christians into the mountains until 1697, when Bashir Shihabi – a distant relative of Fakhr ad-Din, but a Sunni Muslim – rose to power. Elected prince as Bashir I, he subdued the feudal landlords and restored order. His dynasty was to dominate Lebanon until 1842, and was marked by economic growth and prosperity.

As so often before and after, the subsequent fate of the area was influenced by developments outside of it. In 1805, Muhammad Ali Pasha, an Albanian military commander of the Ottoman army in Egypt, seized power in Cairo, de-facto winning independence from Istanbul. Muhammad Ali's military ambitions prompted him to modernise the country: he launched the development of local industry and the transport system, developed an irrigation system, and reformed the civil service. Moreover, he introduced conscription, mandatory education and training for his soldiers, thus creating a large standing army: held in barracks to avoid distraction, the emerging officers gradually developed the ideology of nationalism and pride. Moreover, Muhammad Ali's successors continued improving the agriculture and encouraging science, and began establishing ties to Western powers. In 1831, Ali Pasha's son and a gifted general, Ibrahim Pasha, led his army through Palestine into Lebanon. Prince Bashir II Shihabi allied himself with the invaders and the Egyptians allowed him to remain in power. However, this advance was countered by an Anglo-Turkish intervention, which forced Ibrahim Pasha and his troops back to Egypt, and Bashir to flee into exile. Behind them, the Sunnis and the Druze that resented privileges which the Shihabis had accorded to the Christians were determined to regain their lost rights. In autumn 1841, they attacked Christian villages in the Shouf Mountains and massacred many Maronites, in turn prompting the Ottomans to deploy troops and take charge: in 1842, Lebanese autonomy was terminated and the area put under the direct control of Istanbul. At this point in time, Great Britain, France and Russia intervened, forcing the Ottomans to divide Lebanon into two provinces, split by the ancient road connecting Damascus with its natural port Beirut: the northern of the two was ruled by the Christians, while the southern was placed under Druze control.

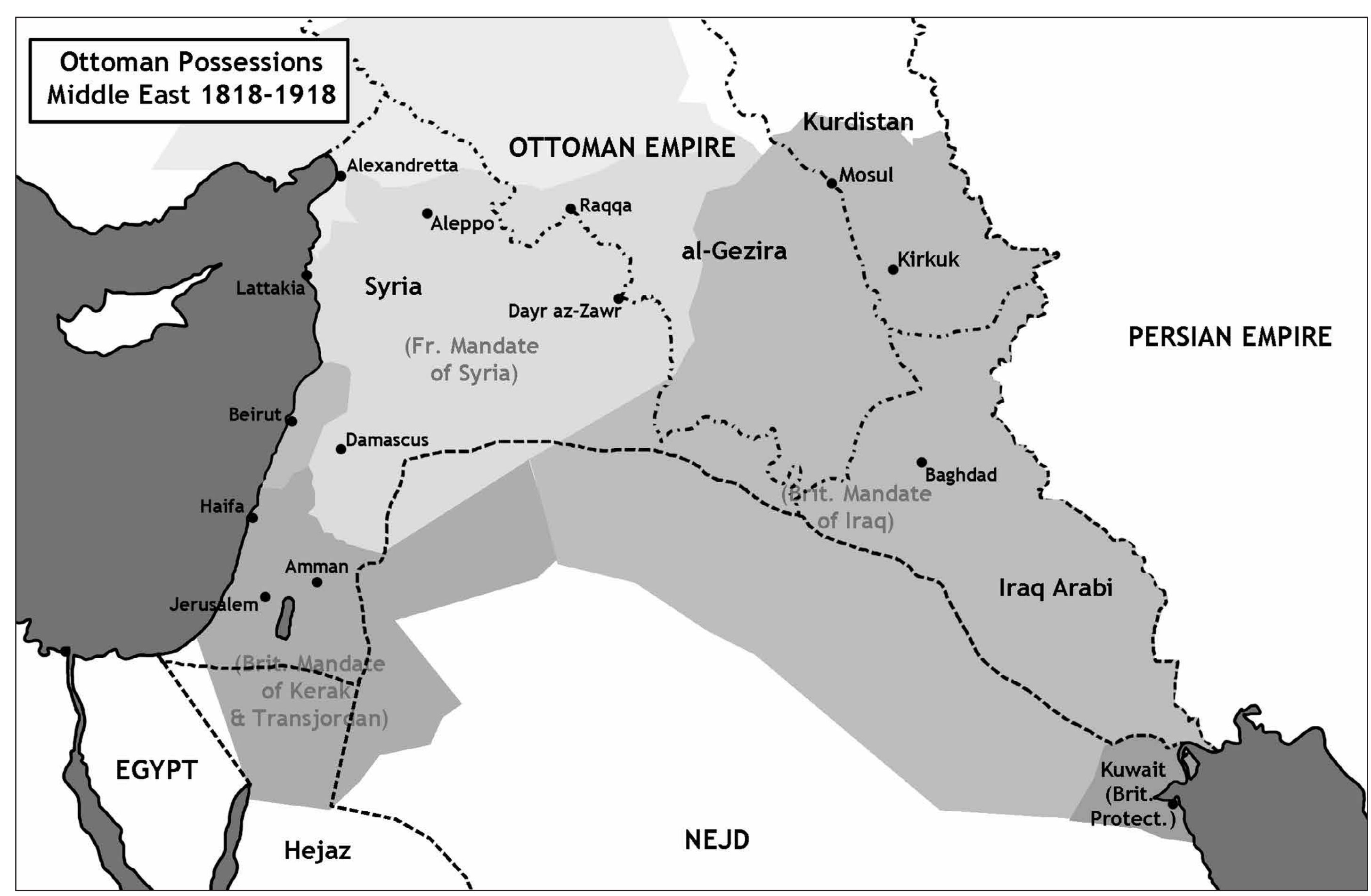
The situation made obvious the obsolescence of the existing administrative structures of the Ottoman Empire. Correspondingly, by 1839 Istanbul launched the *Tanzimat* era, a period of modernisation that – amongst others – carved out the provinces of Aleppo, Zor (Dayr az-Zawr), Beirut, Damascus, and Jerusalem out of the former Syria. The reform did not work in Lebanon: two decades of turmoil and a confused civil war ensued, generally pitting the Christians of the north against the Druze of the south.

During this period, European influence continued to spread in the Middle East. Financed by European banks, the construction of the Suez Canal was completed in the period 1854-1869, in turn making not only Egypt, but the entire Middle East attractive for the British – and this just about the time when Egypt was hit by epidemic diseases, floods, and fought several wars. The net result was a country administered by British and French controllers that – due to their financial power – became the real decision-makers in Cairo, converting the Muhammad Ali dynasty into a British puppet. Nevertheless, its earlier reforms prompted a cultural, educational, and linguistic revival in much of the Middle East, driving a renaissance of the Arabic-language. Tragically, the revival of Arab nationalism prompted additional inter-communal violence in Lebanon, resulting in a massacre of about 10,000 Christians in 1860. Once again, European powers intervened, forcing the Ottomans to grant autonomy to the Mount Lebanon region. For the following 50 years, this was governed by a Christian governor appointed by the

Sultan in Istanbul as the *Mount Lebanon Mutasarrifate*, while Beirut, the Beka'a Valley, the Akkar Plains in the north and the coastal plains in the south were subjected to direct Ottoman rule. As the uneasy peace was established, the *Mutasarrifate* began to prosper economically and politically. An ever increasing number of local authors began bringing to the Arab world the most advanced ideas of Europe: journalism flourished in Beirut, where the relative freedom of speech attracted Arab intellectuals and foreign missionaries alike. This is how, in 1866, the Syrian Protestant College – the future American University of Beirut – was founded. The American Press was established in 1834, followed by the Catholic Press in 1874, while a year later the Saint Joseph University was established by French Jesuit priests. Before long, Lebanon was widely perceived as the most literate and best-educated country in the Middle East.

Two years later, the young Sultan Abdul Hamid II ascended to the throne in Istanbul following the deposition of his brother Murat. Initially working together with a group of young dissidents of the Committee of Union & Progress (known as 'The Young Turks') Abdul Hamid II promulgated the constitution and a parliament, in 1876-1878, which was attended by Palestinian deputies from Jerusalem. Such ideas of this 'dangerous reformer' were anything other than welcome – especially for foreign powers: before long, the Ottoman Empire found itself fighting multiple wars in the Balkans and against Russia, and embroiled in political turmoil. Realising that the situation was threatening the existence of his empire, Abdul Hamid II dissolved the parliament and usurped all the political powers to recreate an absolutist regime. Understanding that the *Tanzimat* could not bring the disparate people living in the Ottoman Empire to a common identity, he adopted a new ideological principle – Pan-Islamism – as the means of countering European colonization. Simultaneously, he pushed for education and modernisation: a large system of secondary, primary, and military schools was constructed, followed by the establishment of 18 professional schools and the University of Istanbul, all of which aimed to counter foreign influence. While deploying missionaries to preach Islam and the Caliph's supremacy, he took care to construct a network of railways, linking Istanbul to Anatolia, Vienna, and Paris, and then entered cooperation with the German Empire to construct the strategically important Constantinople-Baghdad and Constantinople-Medina Railways.

Even then, the Young Turks remained dissatisfied: in 1908, they forced Abdul Hamid II to restore the constitution and parliament, abolish censorship, and release all political prisoners. Over the following year, 35 new newspapers emerged in the provinces of Aleppo, Zor, Beirut, Damascus, and Jerusalem, of which eight were published in Palestine. A total of 221 state schools had been established in Beirut and northern Palestine too: according to Ottoman documentation, by 1914 there were 98 state and 379 private Muslim schools in Palestine alone. However, such massive projects and further wars resulted in the Empire amassing a huge foreign debt. The resulting economic problems and the fact that the conservative Islamists and other reactionary elements in the state remained powerful, resulted in an attempted counter-coup in 1909: this ended with Abdel Hamid II being deposed, but also the massacres of dozens of thousands of Christian Armenians in the Adana province. The 34th, and last, Sultan of the Ottoman Empire to hold absolute power ended his days as prisoner of the Young Turks in Salonica: when that town fell to Greece, he was returned to



A map of Ottoman possessions in the Middle East from 1818 until 1918, and their 're-distribution' according to the Sykes-Picot Treaty of 1916. (Map by Tom Cooper)

Istanbul, where he died in 1918.

THE SYKES-PICOT TREATY

In 1915, what was officially still the Ottoman Empire entered the First World War on the side of the Austro-Hungarian and German Empires. Determined to crush all traces of nationalism and western influence, Istanbul promptly ended Lebanon's autonomy, and imposed martial law. Incessant military requisition of food caused widespread famine and poverty. Unknowingly, The Young Turks – the party that actually had the final word in Istanbul – thus played right into the hands of Great Britain, France, and an increasingly-powerful Jewish nationalist movement in Europe.

Realizing that the Arabs were fed up of the Ottomans, in 1915 the British began working on convincing Sharif Hussein of Mecca to launch an uprising against the Turks, in turn promising him help in creation of an independent government *over all Arab lands under Ottoman control*. Around the same time, they made similar promises to Ibn Saud, Hussein's enemy and a leader of the Wahhabite movement in the Arab Peninsula, on similar conditions. Although sceptical, Hussein left his sons Abdallah and Faysal to lead an armed revolt in 1916. Supported by the British Army, they moved into Palestine and Syria, gradually forcing the Ottomans to withdraw. Hussein's scepticism was well-substantiated: during the same year London and Paris secretly agreed the Sykes-Picot Treaty, according which they decided to distribute the remnants of the Ottoman Empire between themselves.

ZIONIST IMPACT

Meanwhile, in the wake of an entire series of genocidal persecutions – or 'pogroms' – of Jews in Russia between 1823 and 1905, and multiple waves of anti-Semitism that hit Europe, approximately 1.75 million Jews migrated to the Americas. Those left behind began developing their own ideas: although knowing that the area was densely populated and intensively cultivated, a group led by Theodor Herzl developed designs for the re-establishment of a Jewish homeland in the territory defined as the 'historic Land of Israel' – roughly corresponding to Canaan. This became the centrepiece of the Zionist movement. The first modern Jewish agricultural settlement was established as Petach Tiqwa in 1878, and between 1882 and 1903 the first wave of 25,000 immigrants entered Palestine in a movement that became known as the 1st Aliya. Their arrival prompted the Ottomans to reorganize Palestine into the districts of Jerusalem, Nablus and Acre, of which the first was attached directly to Istanbul, while the others were administrated from Beirut.

Gradually, the Zionist ideology crystallized and the Jewish Colonization Association began funding further immigration. Between 1905 and 1914 the second wave – the 2nd Aliya – of about 40,000 followed in the wake of the abortive revolution in Russia and, amongst others, resulted in foundation of the city of Tel Aviv north of Jaffa, in 1909. Moreover, in 1917 the Zionists influenced the British Secretary of State Arthur James Balfour into issuing a public statement of support for the establishment of a 'national home for the Jewish people', while understanding that, '…nothing shall be done which may prejudice the civil and religious rights of existing non-Jewish communities in Palestine…' Despite such declarations, through all of this time the British government continued making additional promises to the Arabs: indeed, even the Armistice of Mudros that concluded the hostilities between the Turks, British and the French on 30 October 1918, contained a promise of Arab control over their own land.

Of course, the armistice in question was the result of the military defeat of the Ottomans. On 30 September 1918, the British 'Egyptian Expeditionary Force' that advanced from Egypt via Palestine had captured Damascus. Three days later Faysal Ibn Hussein entered the city with the intention of establishing the promised Arab state according to his father's agreements with London's emissaries. Supported by a myriad of local nationalist groups, on 5 October 1918 he announced the establishment of the Arab Kingdom of Syria. This 'fully and absolutely independent state' included all of modern-day Lebanon, Palestine, Syria, most of Jordan, parts of Iraq and Turkey, and was declared as 'based on justice and equality'.

Ironically, the Zionists actually respected the Arab Kingdom of Syria sufficiently for their leader Chaim Weizman – the same who negotiated the Balfour Declaration – to quickly sign an Agreement with King Faysal, on 3 January 1919. According to this document



Arabian cavalry with the Flag of the Arab Kingdom of Syria. (Albert Grandolini Collection)

– the Faysal-Weizman Agreement – an immigration of Jews into Palestine on a large scale was to be encouraged on condition of the Zionist movement assisting Arab residents and the Arab state in its further development, and Palestine remaining within the area of Arab independence. The Zionists not only submitted this Agreement to the Paris Peace Conference without caveat, but subsequently used it to variously argue that their plans had the prior approval of the Arabs – or declaring it as null and void.

THE ARAB KINGDOM OF SYRIA

Subsequent British and French actions all went in exactly the opposite direction. While imposing a military occupation with the aim of carving out Iraq and Transjordan as independent nations, the British withdrew from Syria and Lebanon by 1920. Moreover, ignoring the findings of the (US-run) King-Crane Commission – tasked with establishing the opinion of the local population regarding the disposition of non-Turkish areas within the former Ottoman Empire – during the 1919 Paris Peace Conference, London and Paris distributed the Middle East between themselves along the



King Faysal of the Arab Kingdom of Syria. (via Tom Cooper)



A cover page of the 'Book of Independence', with a map depicting the borders of the Arab Kingdom of Syria, as published in Damascus in 1919. (Tom Cooper Collection)



Yusuf al-Azma, Minister of War and Chief-of-Staff of the Army of the Arab Kingdom of Syria. (via Tom Cooper)



King Faysal (centre) with Yusuf al-Azma, both in full uniforms and with the flag of the Arab Kingdom of Syria. (via Tom Cooper)

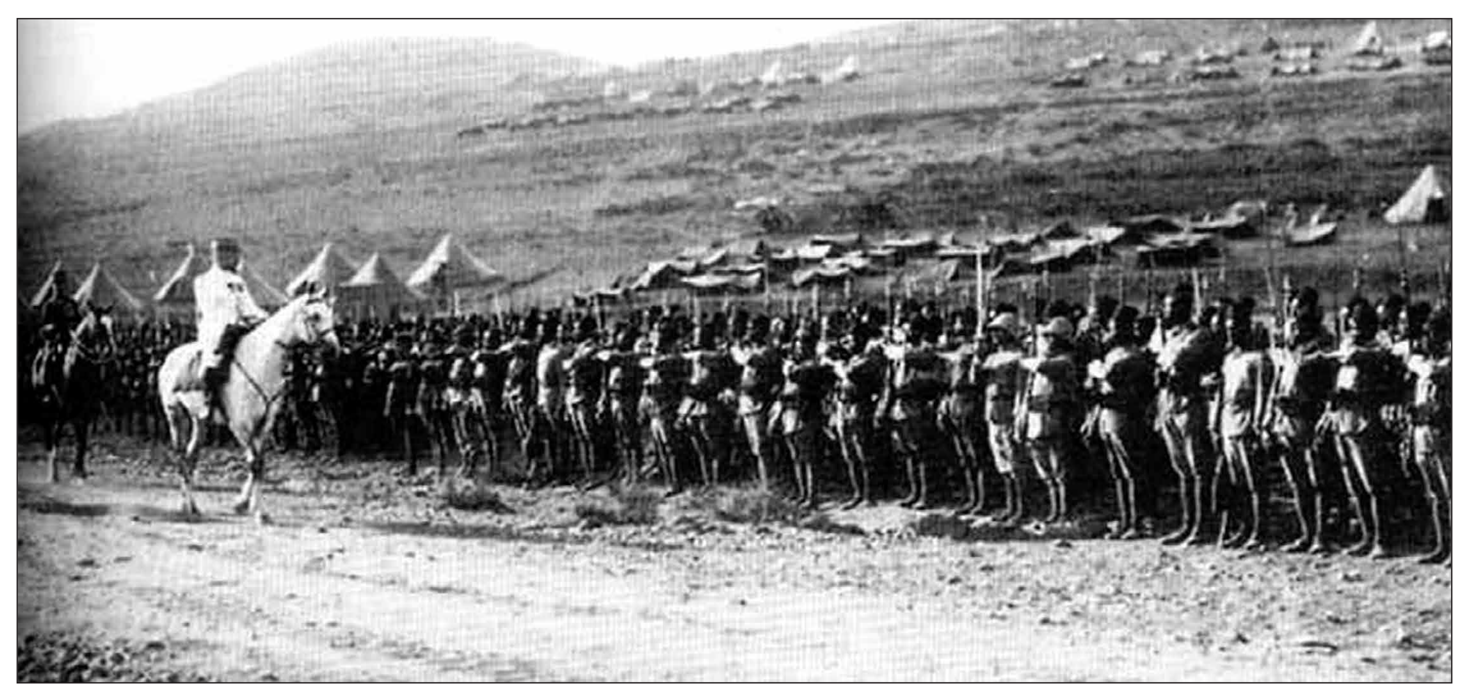
lines agreed by Sykes and Picot. Indeed, although the locals proved vehemently against any foreign powers and pro-independence, the British refused to withdraw. The French followed in fashion: after negotiations with the local nationalists failed, they landed their troops in Lebanon and launched an advance inland: to their surprise, they found themselves exposed to violent counterattacks. In attempt to counter a French invasion, in March 1920, the independence-minded supporters set up the Syrian Congress: this officially declared Faysal the king, and the Arab Kingdom of Syria as a constitutional monarchy with Hashim al-Attassi as Prime Minister and Yusuf al-Azma as Minister of War and Chief-of-Staff of the emerging army.

THE BATTLE OF MAYSALOON

The unilateral action of the Arab nationalists was promptly repudiated by London and Paris, and during the San Remo Conference of April 1920, the League of Nations confirmed the allocation of the Middle East to Great Britain and France. Although simultaneously facing major anti-French uprisings in form of the Hananu Revolt (also known as the 'Aleppo Revolt', in the area between Lattakia, Antioch and Aleppo), and the Alawite Revolt (in the Jabel an-Nusayriyah Mountains, east of Lattakia), on 14 July 1920 the commander of French forces in Lebanon, General Henri Joseph Gouraud, issued an ultimatum to King Faysal, demanding that he disband the army of the Arab Kingdom of Syria and submit to French control. Concerned about the prospects of a long and bloody fight with the French, King Faysal surrendered himself and his cabinet. His troops concentrated at Anjar, along the Beirut-Damascus road and in the Anti-Lebanon Mountains over the Beka'a Valley, four days later. However, Faysal's order to surrender did not reach his Minister of War: moreover, Yusuf al-Azma was determined to defend the country from the French advance. While having no illusions about the outcome of the coming battle, he wanted to make it clear that the Arab Kingdom of Syria would not surrender without a fight.



Troops of the Army of the Arab Kingdom of Syria gathering at Maysaloon. (National Assad Library of Syria)



Gouraud (mounted) inspecting French Troops at Maysaloon. (Courtesy: Archive Gouraud)

Gathering whatever troops and civilians he could find he led them in the direction of Khan Maysaloon – an isolated *caravanserai* on the Beirut-Damascus road, about 25 kilometres west of the latter, and the staging point for the French advance on Damascus.

At dawn of 24 July, the commander of the far better equipped French force, General Mariano Goybet, deployed units of Algerian and Senegalese infantry to launch an assault on Khan Maysaloon and Wadi al-Qarn. Led by tanks, these quickly stormed the central position of the Syrian defensive line, while the Moroccan Spahi cavalry flanked from the north and south. Lacking coordination, Arab forces put up stiff resistance and inflicted casualties, but by 1030hrs the French reached al-Azma's headquarters (HQ), where the latter was gunned down. Although the French air force continued bombing and harrying the survivors as they retreated towards Damascus for hours longer, this marked the end of the Battle of Maysaloon. While ignored by the West as much as the short-lived Arab Kingdom of Syria, this event went down in local history as a synonym for heroism and hopeless courage against all odds – as much as for Western treachery and betrayal – and was annually commemorated by Syrians until 2011.

SEEDS OF BITTERNESS

Starting as a military affair, the British and French colonialism in the Middle East also ended as a military affair. After gradually putting down all the armed uprisings, Gouraud was appointed the High Commissioner for the French Mandate in Lebanon and Syria. Once in power, he did his best to delete the conquered Arab Kingdom of Syria from the pages of history: the leaders of the defeated state were vigorously prosecuted and either forced into exile, sentenced to death or long terms in prison. Only two months after the conquest of Damascus, in September 1920 – and in complete ignorance of its potential for sectarian conflicts – Gouraud began dividing diverse parts of the former kingdom into statelets based on sectarian backgrounds: he announced the formation of the State of Greater Lebanon with its capital in Beirut – as the Maronite homeland. On advice from the Maronite and Jesuit clergy, and despite fierce protests by even the most prominent Christians in the country, he decided this new nation would include not only Beirut, but also the fertile plain of Beka'a and the mountains surrounding it to the north, east, and south. In similar fashion, he created the Jabal al-Druze State for the Druze in Hauran, the Alawite State for the Alawites in the coastal mountains, and the states of Damascus and Aleppo. Finally, he organized the Administrative Council as a 'government' of Lebanon, and single-handedly appointed Christians to 66% of its positions. To add salt to the wound, Gouraud then reportedly visited the tomb of Saladin in Damascus to say '…awake, Saladin: we have returned. My presence here consecrates the victory of the Cross over the Crescent'.

Over the following weeks, and together with his General Secretary and chief strategist, Robert de Caix, Gouraud went to lengths to establish the principal patterns of the French regime. While during the final century of the Ottoman Empire the local administrative structures enjoyed widespread freedoms in day-to-day functions, and these were carried out by local notables, the French administrators declared precisely the same as their principal enemies. Instead, they began favouring minorities – like the Maronite and Alawites – and nominally appointing them to rule diverse local affairs, always closely monitored by French 'advisors'. Of course, after 'finding out' that the natives would be 'incapable of practicing self-government', these advisors usually failed to 'teach': they began performing their functions instead. While retaining some semblance of control for a while through bribing diverse tribal leaders and brutally prosecuting any kind of opposition, the mistreatment made a major showdown inevitable.

THE GREAT SYRIAN REVOLT

On 23 August 1925, Sultan Pasha al-Atrash – a Druze notable from the Suwayda area – officially declared revolution against France, thus sparking an armed revolt that quickly spread over all of Syria and into parts of Lebanon. Early on, Atrash's forces trounced the French in the battles of al-Kafr (July 1925), and al-Mazraa (August 1925), and brought all of Homs and Hama under their control by subjecting enemy units to simultaneous attacks from multiple directions. The French rushed thousands of troops – equipped with modern arms and supported by air power – from Morocco and Senegal to the scene. In the course of the battles for Homs and



Sultan Pasha al-Atrash, leader of the Great Syrian Revolt of 1925-1927, and subsequently an influential political figure in the early years of the independent Syria. (Library of Congress, LC-M32-3398A)



Smoke rising over Damascus following a French air raid in October 1925. (Albert Grandolini Collection)

Hama, they easily defeated concentrated rebel forces with help of their superior firepower. In mid-September 1925, additional French forces defeated the rebels in the battle of al-Musayfirah, in southern Syria, and then captured as-Suwayda, the centrepiece of the revolt. A month later, the French deployed combat aircraft and tanks to support the advance of their ground troops into Damascus. The local rebel forces were well dispersed and the task of securing the Ghouta – the agricultural belt of the metropolis – proved frustrating for the invaders: thus they looted and torched the village of Jaramana as they went, subsequently putting the mutilated bodies of dozens of villagers on display in downtown Damascus. Outraged, the rebels counterattacked into the Old City, quickly securing it. The French Forces commanded by General Maurice Gamelin reacted with fierce artillery and aerial bombardment that lasted nearly five days and massacred up to 1,500 people. Although supported by the majority of the population, after realizing that their attack had failed to dislodge the mandate authorities and was certain to cause widespread misery in return, the rebels withdrew without a fight. Through 1926, the French continued to bomb and shell numerous villages around Damascus and further north, effectively ending any organized mobilisation against them. After increasing their total troop strength to more than 50,000, they moved out to Homs and then Hama, causing widespread destruction before subduing armed opposition in early 1927. Sentenced to death in absentia, Sultan al-Atrash and the majority of the surviving rebel leaders were forced to escape to the British-controlled Transjordan. Nevertheless, praised as a national hero and widely respected for his patriotism, the leader of the revolt was to remain active and influential in Syrian politics for another 40 years.

INDEPENDENCE OF LEBANON AND SYRIA

Although ending with a defeat, the Great Syrian Revolt forced the French mandate authorities into serious negotiations with leading Arab nationalists and nobles. Combined with the British efforts to establish Iraq and Transjordan as separate states – the last under exiled King Faysal – while maintaining their direct mandate over Palestine, it had far-reaching consequences: a large part of the local population was united in their efforts against the imperialists for the last time. During the five-day siege of Damascus, local Muslims took great care to protect their Christian and Jewish neighbours. Before long, they were to end disunited through a series of political decisions taken by foreigners.

Syria and Lebanon remained under tight French grip for a decade longer: lengthy negotiations did result in a Treaty of Independence, in September 1936, but Paris never ratified this before France was defeated and largely conquered by Nazi Germany, in May-July 1940. After some hesitation, the French administration of Syria followed the line of the collaborationist government established in Vichy: indeed, it not only stopped resisting Germany and Italy, but gradually took a definite pro-German and anti-British attitude. On 9 December 1940, General Henri Dentz – a convinced collaborator – was appointed as the new French High Commissioner and Commander of the French forces in Syria (and thus in Lebanon). Following the German advance into the Balkans, in April-May 1941, Syria became important as a conduit between Berlin and a mutiny within the Iraqi military, the leaders of which requested German support. Amid continuous political unrest, riots and strikes provoked by Arab nationalists, increased agitation by German Orientalists, and the prospect of the mandate territory

being used for designs upon the Suez Canal and the Persian Gulf, in June 1941 British, Australian, and Indian forces – supported by the Free French – launched an invasion of Syria from Transjordan and Palestine. The Vichy troops offered some resistance, but Damascus was captured by 21 June: by 14 July, approaching British troops and continuous unrest among the natives caused them to give up.

Under severe pressure from London, the Free French authorities proclaimed the independence of Syria on 16 September 1941, and announced a termination of the mandate. A new government was established, including a number of leading Arab nationalists, and this promptly announced its intention of building up a strong military to fight on the side of the allies – but also for the independence of Syria. On 26 November 1941, the Free French reacted with an announcement of the independence of Lebanon as a republic based on the unique concept of 'confessional democracy', written down in the National Pact. Based on the 1932 census, when the Christians still represented the biggest ethno-religious group in Lebanon, this was a 'gentleman's agreement' according to which the Christians renounced the protection of Western Powers and Muslims a union with Syria or other states – in exchange for the Christians being granted the dominant political role – while accepting Arabic as the official language and defining Lebanon as being a part of the Arab World.[2] However, in their first free elections, the majority of the Lebanese elected a party led by a Muslim and a fervent Arab nationalist. When the emerging Lebanese Parliament then also voted for full sovereignty and independence, the French deployed the military on the streets and sacked the entire cabinet. Only violent disorder in Beirut and additional pressure from London finally left Paris without a choice: the French withdrew the military, recalled their top representatives and left the Lebanese government free. Lebanon was thus truly released into independence in 1943. Syria had to wait for three years longer: only continuous pressure from its nationalists – and additional pressure from London – finally forced the French to evacuate their troops in 1946.

Already before the 1943-1946 period, deep rifts had begun to emerge between leading Lebanese and Syrian politicians. While the Syrians desired the establishment of a country within the borders of the former Arab Kingdom of Syria – stretching from the Taurus Mountains in the north to the Sinai desert in the south, and including an autonomous Lebanon – and while their successive governments were especially active in the question of preparing such a federation and protecting the Arab character of Palestine even before the country was formally released into independence, the Lebanese remained pre-occupied with sectarian problems at home and thus foremost minded their own business. Combined, these factors prevented a re-union of the two countries, regardless of how much this was demanded by many of the natives.

ARAB REVOLT IN PALESTINE

The disastrous outcome of the Franco-Syrian War of 1920 and the Great Syrian Revolt prompted many Arab nationalists to flee to Palestine. By the time they arrived there, the area had not only experienced the 1st and 2nd Aliya, but Zionist immigration had further intensified: at the beginning of the 20th century, Palestine was populated by about 600,000 Arabs (about 10% of whom were Christians) and 55,000 Jews. On 24 July 1922, the Balfour Declaration was officially incorporated into the League of Nation's mandate for Palestine. Seeing this as a threat to their homeland and identity, and facing dispossession and oppression at the hands of the British and the Jews, the local population revolted. Demonstrations against the Jewish immigration and the politics of the British mandate erupted as early as 1920, and the continuous unrest culminated in the riots of 1929, when at least 116 Arabs and 133 Jews were killed in Hebron and Jerusalem. The mandate authorities reacted with additional promises and several commissions – all of which concluded that the Palestinian unrest was caused by the disappointment in the non-fulfilment of promises of independence and the British support for economic and political subjugation of the local population to the Zionists. After delegates from 22 countries met to discuss the threat of Zionism and demand the democratic institutions they had been promised, in December 1931, the British proposed a legislative council to settle the dispute peacefully. The Zionists refused and their top authority – meanwhile renamed into the Jewish Agency – intensified immigration even after the British attempted to impose limits on this, eventually prompting the Arabs into a general strike and, when that failed, an armed rebellion. The latter was brutally suppressed by the British Army and the Palestine Police Force: in cooperation with Zionist militias like Haganah, by 1939 the British had killed more than 5,000 and wounded up to 15,000 – over 10% of the contemporary adult male Palestinian population between 20 and 60. The military potential of the Palestinian Arabs was thus destroyed only years before their ultimate confrontation with the Zionists. Meanwhile, immigration continued: the Jews from Europe soon made-up more than one third of the population. Through cooperation with the British colonial authorities and security forces, thousands of their young men received good military training: between 1941 and 1944, the Haganah – the Jewish military established already in 1920 – was expanded to include a naval company and a large squadron operating miscellaneous civilian aircraft.[3]

THE WAR OF 1947-1949

Another of the means the British used to end the Arab revolt was the White Paper of 1939, under which their administration promised to place further restrictions on Jewish immigration and land purchases, and to release Palestine into independence. Unsurprisingly, as soon as the battlefields of the Second World War had moved on from this area, in early 1944, Jewish militants ceased their cooperation with the British and launched an insurgency characterised by constant assassinations, bombings, and sabotage. As the British reacted with arrests, prison sentences, floggings, and death penalties, the Zionists reacted with a highly effective propaganda campaign aimed at gaining sympathy abroad. Superimposing the plight of survivors of the Nazi-run Holocaust in Europe of 1933-1945 – when 6 million Jews were systematically persecuted, incarcerated and murdered – they claimed that the British were pursuing similar, 'anti-Semitic' designs. The campaign was particularly successful in the USA: subjected to severe anti-Semitism in their new homeland, the American Jews proved not only sympathetic to the Zionist cause but openly hostile to Great Britain. Exhausted from the Second World War and heavily dependent on US economic support for its survival, the government in London bowed to the growing pressure. After its final attempt to mediate between the Arabs and the Zionists failed, in April 1947 it formally referred the 'Palestine question' to the United Nations (UN).

On 29 November 1947, the General Assembly of the United Nations adopted a resolution for a Partition Plan for Palestine, recommending the creation of two independent states – one Arab and one Jewish – and the creation of an international enclave in Jerusalem. While initially refusing to comply with the idea, concluding it was unable to maintain control, London announced its intention to withdraw from Palestine by 15 May 1948. Arabs

protested, Jews celebrated, while British authorities ceased opposing the successive waves of escalating violence: riots, atrocities, attacks, bombings, ambushes, reprisals and counter-reprisals, and the Grand Mufti of Jerusalem's call for Jihad in Palestine converted the situation into a civil war, spreading panic among the local population. However, while about 70,000 Arabs fled between December 1947 and January 1948, and the operations by Zionist militants then increased that number to 100,000 by March, and then to 250,000-300,000 by mid-May 1948, the Jewish Agency ordered the settlers to keep their positions at any cost. Working feverishly on securing the influx of additional troops, arms and supplies from abroad, the Zionists knew that the popular opinion abroad, and time, were on their side. To what degree is obvious from an assessment prepared for the Joint Chiefs of Staff of the US armed forces in March 1948, which stressed the following:


Palestinian irregulars of the group led by Abdal-Qadr al-Husayni, in Jerusalem, February 1948. (Albert Grandolini Collection)

- 'Zionist strategy will seek to involve [the United States] in a continuously widening and deepening series of operations indented to secure maximum Jewish objectives.'

The same document listed these objectives as follows:

a) initial Jewish sovereignty over a portion of Palestine;
b) acceptance by great powers of the right to unlimited immigration;
c) the extension of Jewish sovereignty over all of Palestine;
d) the expansion of 'Erez Israel' into Transjordan and into portions of Lebanon and Syria, and
e) the establishment of Jewish military and economic hegemony over the entire Middle East.[4]

Rather amazingly, while openly admitted by Jewish leaders in Palestine of the time, and obviously pursued – to the last dot and comma – not only during the war of 1947-1949, but by successive Israeli governments over the following 40 years, this plan remains either completely ignored or has been openly supported by all the possible Western powers ever since, regardless of the repercussions.

Certainly enough, as of early 1948, the public impression was that the Zionists would be very far away from realising such intentions. Reinforced by volunteers from Iraq, Lebanon, Syria and Transjordan, organized into the Damascus-headquartered Arab Liberation Army, the Palestinians scored several victories early on. By April 1948, the areas controlled by the Zionists were split into several isolated cantonments, the largest of which were along the coastline and in Jerusalem. However, with Arab governments proving reluctant to become directly involved before the official British withdrawal, the far better equipped, organized and supported Jewish forces not only held out but gradually gained superiority. Reinforced by large shipments of arms and ammunition from Czechoslovakia, the main Jewish paramilitary organisation in Palestine, Haganah, launched an all-out offensive in April 1948: it defeated Arab militias in Tel Aviv, Haifa and Tiberias, and then ethnically cleansed nearly all of the local population as it went. Henceforth, the expulsion of Palestinians became a regular practice – and was frequently undertaken on direct order from the first president of what, on 15 May 1948, was officially declared as the State of Israel, David Ben-Gurion. In June and July, the Haganah emptied Lydda/Ramleh and Nazareth; while between July 1948 and July 1949, it forced the remaining Palestinians out of Galilee and Negev.

The matters in Palestine were thus very much 'clear' already before the British withdrawal from Palestine, on 14 May 1948 and a 'coalition of Arab states invaded nascent Israel', a day later, as taught in most of the narratives released ever since. Moreover, there was no 'Arab coalition': not only that the Egyptians argued with their arch-rival, Prince Abdullah of Transjordan, but the Syrians were at odds with the Iraqis. Assuming the position of 'Commander in Chief of the United Arab Armies' Abdullah thus led the largest contingent – the British-trained 10,000-man Arab Legion – into an attack on Nablus and Ramleh, near Tel Aviv, only supported by an Iraqi contingent. Unsurprisingly, except for the Egyptian and Jordanian operations, the Arab intervention ended as a lukewarm attempt. Acting in isolation, the Lebanese halted their advance into Galilee after satisfying themselves with a few minor early victories. The Syrians did join them in a successful advance on Kadesh, in early June, but both quickly lost most of their gains to an Israeli counteroffensive. The Egyptians did advance deep into Palestine, but then found themselves facing an entire series of counteroffensives – all of which became possible due to the inactiveness of supposed allies further north. Interrupted by multiple ceasefires that regularly bought time for the Israelis to bring in additional reinforcements and equipment, the 10-month long war saw the Arabs failing to

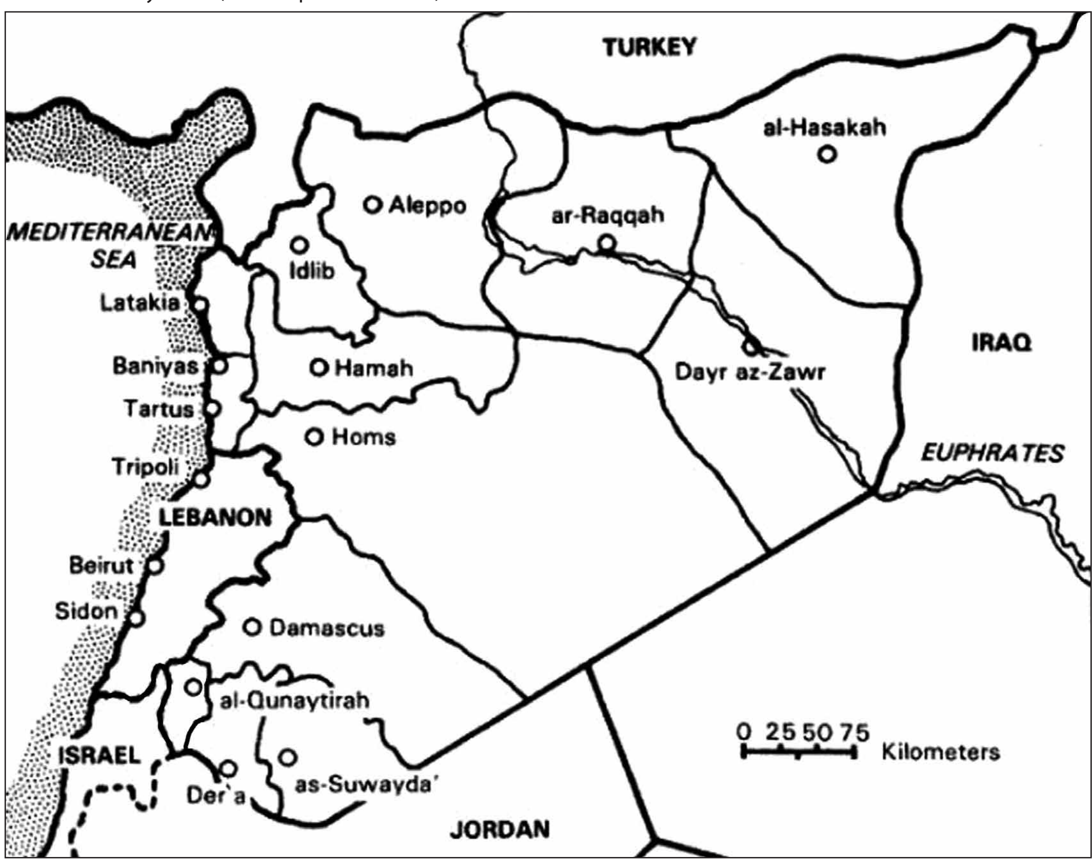
establish themselves in control of most of the areas granted to the Palestinians by the UN. Ultimately, what became the Israeli Defence Force grew into a clearly superior armed force: by the time the war was concluded with a series of separate cease-fire agreements, between February and April 1949, the emerging Israel successively defeated the Lebanese and Syrian armed forces in the north, and Egyptians in the south, while fighting the Iraqis and Jordanians to a standstill in the east. Ultimately, Israel established itself in control of over 78% of the former British Mandate of Palestine – about a third more than what was originally allocated to it by the UN partition proposal. Only the regions under the control of Egyptian, Iraqi and Transjordanian forces remained under Arab control.

AN-NAKHBA ('DISASTER')

Eager to secure his gains, on 1 December 1948, Prince Abdullah proclaimed himself the King of Arab Palestine: on 13 December, his parliament approved a union of Transjordan with the part of Palestine west of the Jordan River in the form of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan. Although never officially acknowledged by the international community, the de-facto distribution of what was left of Palestine was thus complete: the area in question subsequently became known as the West Bank. Although his forces still held a strip of Palestine some 41 kilometres (25 miles) long and 6-12 kilometres wide (3.7-7.5 miles) from Rafah to Gaza, King Farouk of Egypt did not follow in fashion: he put the resulting Gaza Strip under the nominal control of the 'All-Palestine Government', while actually subjecting it to military occupation.



Combatants of the Haghanah seen in the process of ethnically cleansing remaining Palestinians from the port of Haifa on 12 May 1948. (Mark Lepko Collection)



A map of Syria with its governorates, and Lebanon, as of the 1946-1967 period. (CIA)

Characteristically, amid all the resulting turmoil, next to nobody paid attention to the actual victims of this war: the Palestinians. Certainly enough, King Abdullah was widely perceived as their spokesman in the West, although being at odds with most Palestinian nationalists – of which there were many. While exact causes and precise figures remain a matter of fierce dispute – between historians, and even more so in public – it is hard to deny that more than 700,000, perhaps up to 1 million Palestinians – Christians and Muslims alike – were expelled from their homes and forced to flee from what became Israel, and were never permitted to return. Despite all the arguing whether this flight was 'spontaneous', as claimed by the Zionists, or a well-orchestrated operation of ethnic cleansing, as concluded by a growing number of historians, there is no way to whitewash the fact that the Israeli authorities not only depopulated about

400 Arab towns and villages, but also completely destroyed most of these, and then announced that the Palestinians had to bear the consequences of declaring a war on Israel. Unsurprisingly, the 1947-1949 War became known as the 'Disaster' (*an-Nakhba*) within the Arab world. Ben-Gurion's government then did its best to encourage Jews in the Middle East to move: combined with persecution by local authorities – often explained as 'revenge for Palestine' – this resulted in 567,000 Jews leaving countries in North Africa and the Middle East between 1948 and 1957 to – mostly, but not always – settle in Israel. Ironically, in complete disregard for the Palestinian right to self-determination, this act is often mis-explained as some sort of 'exchange of population', where there was none. Except for Syria, none of the neighbouring Arab countries accepted the Palestinian refugees to integrate into their nations: instead, they were kept in huge camps. Ironically, the same international community that created Israel then simply accepted the situation created by the violence: when the General Assembly of the United Nations adopted its Resolution 194 on 11 December 1948, with the aim of establishing the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), it merely provided an official confirmation for the emergence of the term 'Palestinian Refugee' – an issue providing plentiful excuses for all sorts of misguided politics and the worst sort of oppressive dictatorships, aggressive wars, human rights violations and atrocities, and thus haunting the Middle East ever since (and certain to continue doing so for decades longer).

THE SUEZ WAR OF 1956 AND THE TURMOIL OF 1958

The humiliating defeat in what the Arabs call the Palestine War and the Israelis call their War of Independence, shook the Arab world and provoked widespread upheavals. It brought to the surface an entirely new generation of politicians nurtured on what was considered an injustice of Zionist military occupation and dispossession of Arab people with the assistance of Western powers. For a while at least, some of the politicians in Lebanon and Syria considered the idea of forming a union, preferably expanded through the addition of Iraq and Jordan. Indeed, the Lebanese President Camille Chamoun made corresponding overtures in 1953. However, any such designs were abandoned following an entire series of coups and counter-coups led by the Syrian Arab Army (SyAA), the officers of which came to the conclusion that they would not have senior positions in any resulting authorities.

Meanwhile, the arrival of about 150,000 Palestinian refugees in Lebanon in 1947-1948 subjected the National Pact to severe stress. Denied the rights equal to those of Lebanese citizens, embittered refugees began to threaten the fragile sectarian balance. However, they were not the reason for the first major crisis that shook the country in the summer of 1958: instead, the same erupted as a wave of pan-Arabism − inspired by Egyptian President Gamal Abdel Nasser − spread over the entire Middle East following the failure of the Israeli, British and French invasion of Egypt during the Suez War of 1956. Aiming to establish a federation including all the Arab countries, on 1 February 1958, Egypt and Syria proclaimed their union as a United Arab Republic (UAR). To counter the threat emitted by this appearance, on 14 February 1958 the governments of Iraq and Jordan – both of which were ruled by sons of the Hashemite dynasty enthroned by the British in the period 1918-1921 – proclaimed the Arab Federation, with King Faysal II of Iraq as Chief of State. Constructed on a confessional basis, Lebanon never became a secular state in which the power and values of the central government would have exercised effective control over confessional values. Carved out by the French, it became an artificial state of ethno-religious fiefdoms, in which the Christians dominated much of the social, political and economic life, although not representing the majority any longer. Unsurprisingly, inspired by pan-Arabist ideas, many of the Muslims of Lebanon began demanding that the country join the UAR. Almost immediately, riots erupted and armed gangs emerged on both the Christian and the Muslim sides. Led by Prime Minister Saeb Salam, the latter began attacking existing power structures. As the fighting spread from Beirut to Sidon, and then to Balbek, the UAR Army deployed two of its brigades from Syria inside Lebanon. When Christian militias attempted to block the 'Syrian' advance, fierce fighting erupted around Tripoli and Beirut in June 1958.[5]

The fighting in Lebanon was still heating up when, on 14 July 1958 – mid-way through the process of amalgamation of the Iraqi and Jordanian armed forces – elements of the former launched a coup in Baghdad. King Faysal II was deposed and executed together with most of his cabinet, and a military junta led by Major-General Abdul Karim al-Qassem established itself in power. Only a day later, Qassem proclaimed a republic and Iraq's withdrawal from the Arab Federation. Fearful of something similar happening to him, King Hussein of Jordan requested a British military intervention. In Beirut, Chamoun followed in fashion, requesting military assistance from the United States. Misinterpreting the pan-Arabism as a joint conspiracy of the UAR and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) with the aim of imposing a pro-Soviet, 'communist' regime in Lebanon, and acting under the provisions of the UN Charter, both superpowers reacted promptly: while the British deployed their paratroopers and combat aircraft to Amman, on 15 July 1958 the first of an eventual 14,000 US Marine Corps and US Army troops were landed on beaches south of Beirut. A day later, the US Marines took control of Beirut International Airport (IAP) and began to guard key areas in the Lebanese capital.[6]

On 31 July 1958, Major-General Fuad Chehab, a Maronite Christian and Commander-in-Chief of the Lebanese armed forces, was elected as the new President of Lebanon. With major installations in the country under control of the government and foreign troops, he introduced a number of major reforms, foremost aiming to replace feudal values and bridge sectarian rifts. While Chehab continued the policy of repression against the Palestinian refugees – meanwhile the primary supporters of pan-Arabist ideas in his country – he received Nasser's recognition of Lebanon's territorial integrity. The looming civil war thus subsided and then died away, enabling US troops to withdraw as confidence in the central government was re-established. An economic boom followed as Chehab's successor in that position, Charles Helous, attempted to continue along the same lines: Lebanon re-emerged as a stable nation and a major centre for finance and trade. However, even Helous never managed to sort out the differences caused by the fact that the authorities of different elements of the government remained distributed unevenly along socio-religious lines: although Christians were meanwhile down from about 22% of the population (according to the census from 1932) to about 15%, they remained dominant in the politics and economy. Thus, while presenting itself as a peaceful cosmopolitan country in public, Lebanon was riddled with differences between no fewer than 17 officially recognized Christian, Islamic, and Islam-derived communities coexisting in a relatively small area. Moreover, Helous' efforts were interrupted by the next major Arab-Israeli War, two additional waves of Palestinian refugees, and by the growing intensity of hatred between the Palestinians, the Israelis, and the Lebanese Christians.[7]

WATER WAR

Understanding that the water supply was one of major issues troubling the Middle East, in the early 1950s the USA and the UN attempted to develop a regional plan for an equitable apportionment and utilisation of the River Jordan and its tributaries among the riparian countries. Israel strongly opposed any such designs and unilaterally launched the construction of the National Water Carrier (NWC), taking away as much water from the Sea of Galillee as it wanted, while in turn pumping saline water and sludge from Lake Tiberias into the lower portion of the Jordan River. The consequences were disastrous – for the environment and for the Jordanian economy: by 1963, the NWC was diverting 60% of the river's total flow, while the River Jordan was reduced to a stinking cesspool.

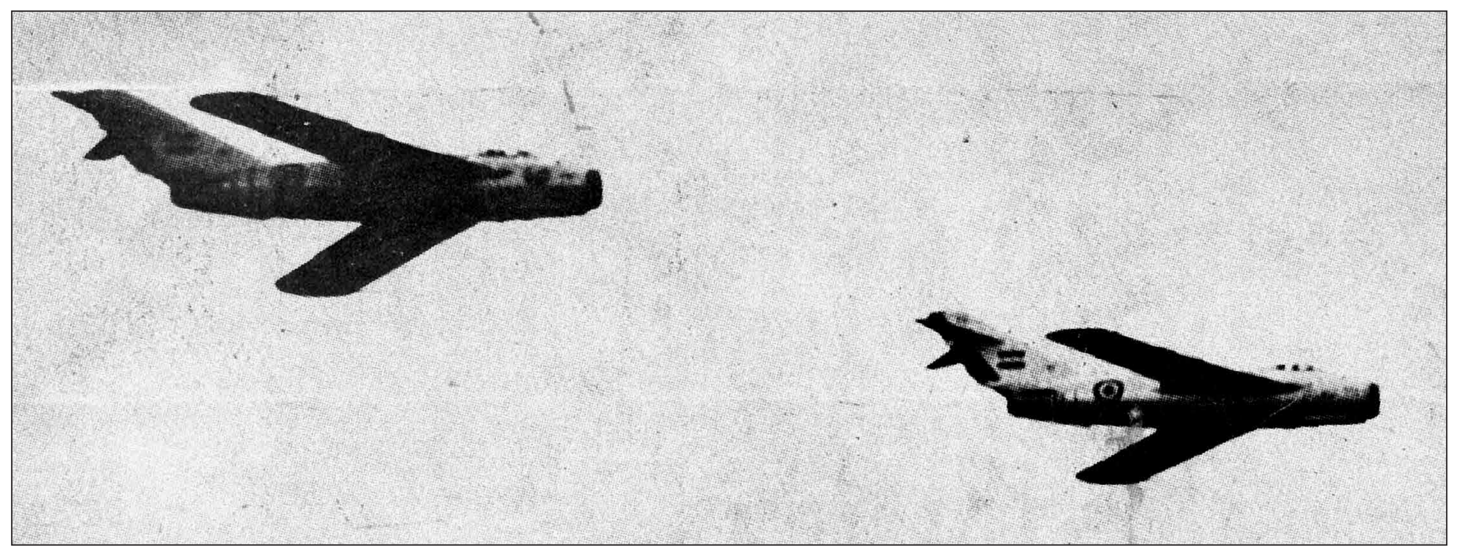
Following Israel's refusal to cooperate, and in cooperation with Jordan, in 1958, the US government launched a project for siphoning water out of the Yarmouk River northeast of its confluence with the Jordan, and transporting it south via a canal running parallel with and just east of the River Jordan: the first part of the resulting East Ghor Canal was completed in early 1967. It not only reduced the flow of water to the River Jordan – and thus the NWC – but irrigated several thousand farms and prompted an economic boom in north-western Jordan.

Other Arab governments followed in fashion. In attempt to resolve numerous inter-Arab conflicts and adopt common politics vis-à-vis Israel, on 13-16 January 1964 the Arab League held its first ever summit in Cairo. Diverse groups of the Palestinian nationalists and the Syrian government demanded a rematch of the war of 1948. However, distrusting each other, and perfectly aware of their countless weaknesses, other governments saw a war only as an ultimate means of countering Israel. Instead they opted for an indirect way of dealing with the political, economic and social aspects of the confrontation. One of the related results was the emergence of the 1964 Headwater Diversion Plan, aimed to counter the construction of the NWC by diversion of two out of three sources of the Jordan River – the Hasbani and the Banias rivers – to the Yarmouk. Prohibitively expensive, technically difficult and barely feasible, the diversion was to distribute the water into Lebanon, Jordan and Syria, while preventing it from reaching the Sea of Galilee and thus Israel. Unsurprisingly, Israel declared the project as an infringement of its sovereign rights, and reacted by exploiting the two 'de-militarized zones' (DMZs) on the cease-fire lines with Syria to provoke repeated aerial and artillery clashes: at every opportunity, the IDF's artillery and combat aircraft of the Israeli Defence Force/Air Force bombed the construction sites of the Headwater Diversion Plan until this came to a standstill.

THE JUNE 1967 WAR

As the tensions continued to mount, on 7 April 1967 Israel launched another provocation. When the Syrians reacted in force, the IDF/AF ambushed the interceptors of the Syrian Arab Air Force (SyAAF) and claimed seven as shot down in air combats that raged from Qunaitra all the way to Damascus. Not keen to incite a war, but seriously concerned about the possibility of an Israeli invasion of Syria, and convinced that Israel was militarily weak and couldn't face a war on two fronts simultaneously, the government of the USSR decided to manipulate the government of Egypt: Moscow informed Cairo that Israel was preparing an invasion of Syria. Ignoring reports from his top military commanders about there being no indications of an Israeli mobilisation, but knowing that back in 1960 a mere mobilisation of the Egyptian armed forces and their deployment on the Sinai Peninsula was sufficient to lessen similar Israeli pressure upon Damascus, Nasser followed the Soviet 'advice': on 15 May 1967, he ordered a general mobilisation and deployment of the Egyptian armed forces on Sinai – in turn sparking a three-week long crisis. Moscow then made another mistake and consented to Nasser's decision to eject the United Nations peacekeeping force that was separating Egyptian and Israeli forces. With this, the USSR lost control of the crisis: attempting to increase pressure upon Israel, Nasser announced a blockade of the Gulf of Aqaba and ordered a withdrawal of the UN peacekeeping contingent without consultations with Moscow, while the Egyptian air force made a series of overflights over the Israeli nuclear research complex at Dimona in the Negev desert.[8]

Alarmed, but also aware of their military superiority, the Israelis took nothing for granted. On 5 June 1967, the IDF/AF launched a murderous aerial onslaught on the Egyptian air bases, knocking out over 200 combat aircraft. Immediately afterwards, the Israelis repeated the exercise in Jordan, and then turned north, forcing the SyAAF to evacuate its surviving aircraft to airfields in the north of the country during the afternoon. With the Israeli air force in possession of aerial superiority, the IDF's ground forces



A pair of SyAAF MiG-17Fs as seen during a ceremonial overflight of Damascus in the mid-1960s. The Syrians had to completely rebuild their armed forces following their split from the United Arab Republic in September 1961. Their air force began that period flying fewer than 40 MiG-17Fs left behind by the UARAF. (David Nicolle Collection)

simultaneously assaulted the Gaza Strip, Sinai and the West Bank. The blow against their air bases had already caused such shock and paralysis within the ranks of top Egyptian military commanders that these convinced themselves that Israel would be supported by the USA and Great Britain. Correspondingly, early on 6 June, Field Marshal Hakim Amer – the Commander-in-Chief of the Egyptian armed forces – issued an order for general withdrawal of all of his troops from Sinai. This quickly turned into a rout, in the course of which the IDF smashed nearly all of the Egyptian Army. With Egypt – at the time the military powerhouse of the Arab world – out of the battle, Jordan quickly lost the West Bank. A sceptical Syrian leadership initially tried to stay out of the battle, but then also lost nerve: a day after the Israelis assaulted the Golan Heights, on 10 June, the Syrian Army was ordered to withdraw towards Damascus. As a consequence, not only did Egypt lose Sinai, but Jordan and Syria lost their most prosperous provinces: in a matter of one week, Israel established itself in possession of military hegemony over the entire Middle East – a status it enjoys until this very day.

To say that the Arabs – at least those that were aware of the full extent of the catastrophe that befell their militaries during the June 1967 War – were stunned by defeat and gripped by shock, humiliation and anger, is an understatement. The war was a shattering experience with far-reaching consequences for not only the entire Middle East. Despite attempts to explain it away, or refer to it as a mere 'setback', the reality of the defeat hit hard: whereas the Arab-Israeli War of 1948, and the Tripartite Invasion of Egypt in 1956 affected only some portions of the Arab nation, and then mainly the military, the defeat of 1967 affected *all* Arabs, and continues to do so until today – even more so because the reasons have rarely been properly studied: the majority of Arab governments preferred to safeguard their own survival, rather than to fully explain the circumstances leading to the catastrophe. With hindsight, it is easy to conclude that the Palestinians suffered the most: not only that at least 250,000 additional inhabitants of the West Bank, the Gaza Strip, and up to 100,000 of the Golan Heights were forced to flee: in the light of new circumstances, they concluded that they could no longer rely on the hosting Arab governments but would have to fight for their own rights – even if from a militarily weak position. Gleaning from tactics of countless other anti-imperialist revolutions of the period, they became determined to fight a guerrilla war with Israel from any territories they would be able to use.[9]

Finally, one should keep in mind that the June 1967 War marked the beginning of the most recent Muslim revival period: the loss of Old Jerusalem, the holy Islamic place was something that no pious Muslim could ever accept: partially unwilling and often incapable of accepting their defeat and the Israeli military superiority, many saw the defeat as 'God's retribution for their straying from the proper Islamic path'.[10]

CHAPTER 2
BUILD-UP OF THE PLO

The issue of Palestinian refugees was, essentially, ignored by nearly all of the involved parties during the 1950s and 1960s: what mattered much more was the illegal activity over the armistice lines of the Palestine War. Between 1949 and 1967, these largely coincided with the international frontier between Lebanon, Syria, Transjordan/Jordan, Egypt and Palestine before the war of 1948-1949, except for the Gaza Strip and a DMZ further south. The majority of such activities – and their number ran into thousands – were related to Palestinian refugees (civilians who either fled or had been expelled from Palestine) attempting to return to or to access the land they had lost. Israel insisted on indiscriminately designating all of them as 'terrorists' and publishing wildly exaggerated figures about the damage these were supposedly causing, thus invariably creating the impression – which remains widespread until the present day – of Israel being subjected to constant and murderous attacks by its neighbours.[1]

In reality, all four Arab governments neighbouring Israel followed the policy of strictly curbing infiltration activities.[2] However, while the Lebanese and Syrian governments proved successful in their efforts, the Egyptians and Jordanians experienced significant problems. Principal amongst these was a lack of troops necessary to control hundreds of thousands of Palestinian refugees settled close to the armistice lines: Egyptian efforts were especially hampered by the terms of the armistice agreement of 1949, which strictly limited the number of Egyptian Army troops deployed in the Gaza Strip.[3]

Instead, it was only later on – in the aftermath of the Suez War of 1956, and even more so after the June 1967 Arab-Israeli War – that attacks by diverse armed Palestinian groups actually picked-up the pace.

EARLY ARMED PALESTINIAN FORCES

In an attempt to bring the chaos along the armistice lines under control, in December 1952 the Egyptian government created the Palestinian Border Police – the first armed and uniformed Palestinian formation in exile. One year later, this consisted of three groups of trainees and a separate Saharti Battalion that underwent three months of training. All the officers and non-commissioned officers were Egyptian, the units were armed with weapons made in Great Britain, and all operated under the command of the Egyptian Army in the Gaza Strip. Their primary purpose was the prevention of infiltrations into Israel, an increasing number of which were meanwhile run by the religiously motivated Moslem Brotherhood of Egypt – with which Nasser's government was at odds. In September 1954, in reaction to the first Israeli attacks into the Gaza Strip, the Egyptian Army established the first battalion-sized formation: the 11th Battalion of the Palestinian Border Guard (PBG). Still only about 700 strong, this included a machine gun and a mortar section. In reaction to the February 1955 Israeli raid into the Gaza Strip, the Egyptian Army raised two additional Palestinian battalions, the 32nd and the 43rd. Through combining these with the 11th Battalion, it created the 86th Brigade, PBG.[4]

By the time of the Suez War in October 1956, this force was further expanded through the creation of the 44th, 45th and 46th Battalions of the 87th Brigade, and numbered around 4,000 men. Furthermore, the Egyptian Army began work on creating a Palestinian commando force known as the 'Fedayeen' ('those who risk', a colloquial designation for the Palestinian militants): this was supposed to be used for infiltrations into Israel – but for reconnaissance purposes. Initially including about 100 Palestinians that received the necessary training, it became operational in April 1955: by the end of the year, it was expanded to about 1,000 and reorganized as the 141st Battalion. Contrary to the units of the PBG, the troops of the 141st Battalion did become involved in several cross-border incidents. When the Israelis occupied the Gaza Strip during the Suez War of 1956, they captured up to 4,000 members of the PBG and the fedayeen: before their withdrawal in March of 1957, the Israelis summarily executed up to 1,200.[5]

After assembling about 400 survivors, the Egyptian Army re-established the 141st Battalion, in Gaza, in April 1957, but

henceforth this unit served as a police service. Instead, most of the survivors of the PGB and new recruits were organized into a newly-established 107th Brigade, based outside Cairo and consisting of the 19th and 20th Battalions. Like before, all the officers, and most of the NCOs were Egyptians, armed with weapons of British origin. Because of the deployment of the United Nations Emergency Force (UNEF) along the armistice lines between Egypt and Israel between 1956 and 1967, none of Palestinian units ever saw any kind of action against Israel.[6]

Keen to present himself as a new Arab leader, in 1960 the Iraqi strongman Qassem created the Palestine Liberation Regiment. Although this unit was quickly disbanded when Qassem was swept from power in February 1963, Nasser reacted by ordering a re-deployment of the 107th Palestinian Brigade – meanwhile reinforced through the addition of the third, 21st Battalion – back to the Gaza Strip, and the establishment of a 2,000-strong militia designated the Popular Resistance. However, the establishment of such units was a matter of politics between Cairo and Baghdad, i.e. based on differences between Nasser and Qassem, rather than an indication of either deciding to launch a war against Israel. In fact, neither of the two was keen to tolerate large groups of foreign armed youths roaming on his property. For this complex set of reasons, bigger and better-organised armed Palestinian forces were nowhere in sight.

CAIRO SUMMIT

This is not to say that there were no other armed Palestinian groups. Indeed, during the 1950s and 1960s, a host of such movements came into being in every single country neighbouring Israel. They all had one thing in common: no matter how much they were exploited for propaganda purposes, in grand total they were all insignificant. Moreover, the longer the Palestinian issue remained unresolved, the more extremist they became. The situation experienced a fundamental change during the Arab League summit in Cairo of 1964, when the idea was born to establish two organisations:



Minister of War of Egypt, Field Marshal Hakim Amer (actually a major by his military qualification) played a crucial role in the organisation and build-up of Palestinian military force in Egypt of 1960. His mishandling of not only the latter, but indeed the entire Egyptian military, and his order for general withdrawal, were direct reasons for the catastrophe during the June 1967 War. (Tom Cooper Collection)

- **Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO)** an umbrella organisation for at least 11 different political factions, was to act as a government in exile; while the
- **Palestine Liberation Army (PLA)** was envisaged as a regular, conventional armed force of the PLO, staffed by Palestinian refugees that would be drafted in multiple host countries instead of serving in local armed forces.

Right from the start, the PLO was dominated by the Palestinian National Liberation Movement – Fatah – surely not the first, but soon the quantitatively strongest group of its kind. Established in 1959 as a movement of students in Beirut and Cairo, it espoused a Palestinian nationalist ideology, and propagated the liberation of Palestine from Zionist occupation. Led by Yasser Arafat and supported by multiple Arab governments, Fatah grew slowly: it remained a small and unimportant movement even after it attempted – and failed – to create an armed uprising of remaining Palestinians in Judea and Samaria. While this failed and the organisation was forced to withdraw to Jordan, its leaders continued operating against Israel. By 1967, Fatah developed into the dominant force in Palestinian politics: through a combination of diplomatic and public-relation skills Arafat profiled himself as a sort of an 'undisputed leader' of all the Palestinians. Eventually, he managed to convert the PLO into a semi-sovereign political entity recognized by most of the Arab states as representing the Palestinian interests. As a government in exile responsible for the realisation of the goal of establishing a sovereign state, and primarily financed by



A knocked-out M4A4 Sherman V of the 20th 'Palestinian' Division of the Egyptian Army, as seen immediately after the June 1967 War. The sole tank battalion of this unit operated about 30 such vehicles. (IDF)

Kuwait, Fatah became the centre of Palestinian economic, social, and cultural life, and assumed the responsibility for health services and education.

Under the aegis of the PLO, Fatah attempted running military operations while still ill-prepared and poorly armed. Its first attack was spoiled by an intervention of the Lebanese armed forces on 31 December 1964. The second left an explosive satchel charge in a water canal that never detonated. Subsequent attacks remained as negligible and remained small in scope and effectiveness. Moreover, with the PLO/PLA-combination meant to take over, not only Fatah and the PLO, but other Palestinian nationalist organisations soon found themselves constrained by host governments.

Originally financed by Kuwait, the PLA was envisaged as a force of five infantry brigades and six commando battalions with a total of 16,100 troops, capable of training up to 30,000 new troops annually. However, the Cairo Summit was barely over when the PLA-related designs came apart. The force was never put under the control of the PLO's Military Department: instead, Amer turned down all the demands and offers from across the Arab world and ran the creation of the PLA entirely on his own. While expanded to about 11,500 by 1966 – organized as listed in Table 1 – the PBG thus remained subordinated to the Egyptian Army.[7]

Adding insult to injury, although subsequently deciding to expand the PBG into the 20th (Palestinian) Division of the Egyptian Army, Amer went as far as to requisition 44 T-34/85 tanks, 12 D-30 howitzers, 300 rocket propelled grenade launchers (RPGs), and 45 mortars acquired by Kuwait for the PLA and assign these to the Egyptian Army. Instead, the sole tank battalion of the emerging division received only 30 old M4A4 Sherman V tanks modified through installation of the FL-10 turrets (from French-made AMX-13 light tanks), while its artillery element was equipped with 10 British-made 25-Pounder (88mm) guns. Although fighting with determination, the 20th Division was destroyed during the Israeli invasion of the Gaza Strip, on 5 and 6 June 1967.[8]

Table 1: Units of the Palestine Border Guard in Egypt, 1966

Brigade	
107th Brigade	319th, 320th, 321st battalions
109th Brigade	322nd, 323rd, 324th battalions
independent	329th Commando Battalion

KHARTOUM SUMMIT

Further development of the Palestinian armed groups was dictated by several simultaneous developments and resulting impressions, all of which were direct results of the June 1967 Arab-Israeli War.

While the 20th Division was destroyed in the June 1967 War, a small PLO force fought very well in a battle for the village of al-Karamalf on the West Bank. Although details remain unclear, it is possible that it defeated the IDF, before being forced to withdraw, together with battered remnants of the Jordanian Army. The PLO thus emerged from the June 1967 War as the sole Arab 'military force' that did not experience a crushing defeat.[9]

In the months after its conquest of the Golan Heights, Israel demolished over one hundred villages and farms and drove another wave of refugees into Lebanon and Syria. While constructing 12 major permanent agricultural settlements, the Israelis transformed the local provincial capital of Qunaitra into a centre of vigorously promoted tourist industry, while further east the IDF constructed extensive fortifications supported by an anti-tank ditch and dense minefields along the entire length of the 65km (40 mile) long Purple Line (named after the colour used to mark it on the maps of UN personnel). Leaning upon a total of 112 pillboxes and blockhouses and 17 larger fortified positions, further to the rear the line was supported by four major ground stations for communications & signal- and for electronic intelligence (COMINT, SIGINT & ELINT), constructed atop Mount Jebel Sheikh, Tel Faris, Tel Hermonit, and Tel Avital.[10]

Another wave of up to 250,000 refugees was driven out of the West Bank into Jordan. Knowing no place to go, the majority settled only metres east of the new armistice line and along the East Ghor Canal. Combined with the fact that the country was still heavily reliant on British and US support for its financial survival, and that the Jordanian armed forces were shattered during the war, their arrival put a giant question mark over the viability of the Kingdom of Jordan as a sovereign nation. By July 1967, less than one-fifth of the population of 2.25 million were native inhabitants: the majority were refugees, full of hatred for Israel.[11] In other words: the mass of 'Jordanians' felt little to no loyalty towards 'their' monarch, renowned for his tendency towards accommodation with Israel. In turn, forced into acceptance of growing anti-Israeli militancy within the ranks of his own armed forces, but also through Iraqi Army troops deployed in his country during the June 1967 War, King Hussein was forced to tolerate the growing number of guerrilla camps. Nevertheless, the Jordanian government adopted a policy of curbing not only the activity of the Palestinian militants, but even the movement of any groups of the same that were 'only' transiting the country.[12]

Held from 29 August until 1 September 1967, the Khartoum Summit of the Arab League saw the Arab leaders meeting to not only discuss the consequences of the catastrophic defeat during the June 1967 War, but to agree what to do next. As usual, despite joint declarations emphasising their unity, the requirement for joint action, and the need to coordinate their efforts, they remained deeply disunited – with corresponding results for the Palestinians. Certainly enough, they all agreed to, amongst others, bolster their support for the PLO by providing US$90-100 million annually. However, the summit produced no clearly defined ideas about how to counter the Israeli military superiority: merely an illusionary declaration that there would be no peace and no negotiations unless Israel would withdraw from occupied territories and accept the right of the Palestinian refugees to return. Ironically, such declarations have, ever since, been widely described as 'Arab rejectionism' of what should have been 'the opportunity' to make peace with Israel – as if the latter hadn't already officially annexed Jerusalem and declared it as its capital, or hadn't converted additional hundreds of thousands of Palestinians into homeless refugees.[13]

PFLP, PFLP-GC, PLA, THE SAIQA AND OTHERS

Disappointment with the slow build-up of the PLO and the PLA, the destruction of the 20th (Palestinian) Division in the Gaza Strip, and the tactical success of the PLO in the West Bank became a key political issue between nearly all of the Palestinian nationalist groups after the June 1967 War. Indeed, it drove them into rejecting supervision by Egypt and Jordan, and seeking a unilateral continuation of the armed struggle through guerrilla warfare. The mass of youths that streamed with refugees into Jordan in particular, swarmed nationalist groups: while many joined the PLO – which subsequently set up its headquarters (HQ) in the town of Karameh, barely 2.1km (1.2 miles) from Allenby Bridge on the River Jordan – another benefactor became the Arab Nationalist Movement led by a Palestinian Christian, George Habash. Originally founded in

Table 2: Major Palestinian Militant Groups, 1967-1970				
Designation	**Leader**	**Base**	**Supporting Governments**	**Approximate Strength**
PLO	Yasser Arafat	Jordan, Lebanon	Kuwait, Egypt, Saudi Arabia	umbrella organisation including Fatah, PFLP and PDFLP
Fatah	Yasser Arafat	Jordan, Lebanon	Egypt	up to 11,000
PFLP	George Habash	Jordan, Lebanon	Syria	2,000-2,200
PFLP-GC	Ahmed Jibril	Syria	Libya, Syria	700-900
PLA		Syria	Syria	3,000-5,000
Saiqa		Syria	Syria	5,000-7,000
PDLFP/DFLP	Nayef Hawatmeh	Jordan, Lebanon	Syria	1,500
PPLO		Jordan, Lebanon	Kuwait	
ALF	Zeid Heidar	Iraq	Iraq	500-700
PPSF	Samir Aousma	Jordan, Lebanon	Iraq	2,000



The 'true strongman' in Syria in the 1964-1970 period was General Salah Jadid. Together with President Nureddin al-Atassi, he allied his country with the USSR while proving fiercely anti-Israel. Indeed, his calls for Israel's destruction resulted in Damascus losing any sympathy in the West. In turn, Moscow's support for him and Atassi was to provoke the June 1967 War. (Nour Bardai Collection)

Lebanon in 1953, immediately after the June 1967 War Habash merged his movement with two others and – with financial backing from Syria – reorganized them as the Popular Front for Liberation of Palestine (PFLP). Moreover, identifying the 'backwardness in the Arab World' as the primary reason for defeats by the 'scientific society of Israel', with help from the former USSR and from Eastern Europe, the PFLP quickly developed into a leftist organisation with Marxist-Leninist ideology. In 1968, Habash joined the PLO to become its second biggest faction after Arafat's Fatah.[14]

Disappointed by the inactivity of the PFLP, a few weeks later the militant wing of the PFLP led by Ahmed Jibril ('Abu Jihad') split to create the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine – General Command (PFLP-GC). While initially a member of the PLO, the PFLP-GC not only always opposed Arafat and Habash, but also any kind of negotiated settlement with Israel. Instead, while taking care to impose iron discipline and keep its fighters loyal and professional, its leadership focused on armed struggle. Attracting support from Libya and Syria, the PFLP-GC soon gained notoriety for a series of aircraft hijackings.

Apparently at least, the government of the Syrian President Dr Nureddin al-Attassi was soon to follow in similar fashion. After all of its diplomatic protests against what Israel was doing on the Golan Heights were ignored, it sided with those Palestinians that demanded a continuation of an armed struggle against the Zionists by means of a popular armed uprising. However, because Attassi and the actual strongman of Syria at the time, Lieutenant-General Salah Jadid, were at odds with their Minister of Defence and Commander of the SyAAF, Lieutenant-General Hafez al-Assad, and the latter was already working on his own designs for taking over in Damascus, the result was two-fold. On one side, the Syrian armed forces began drafting thousands of Palestinian refugees and organising them into the Palestinian Liberation Army – which Assad held well outside the reach of the PLO. Instead, the first major formation of the same, the Hattin Brigade, was expanded into a conventional fighting force with a total of eight units and 12,000 uniformed troops. On the other, the Syrian Ba'ath Party established the Vanguard of the Liberation War (SAIQA, which also means 'Thunderbolt') as a commando force that was to run guerrilla attacks into Israel. In this fashion, the strongmen in Damascus not only retained control over the armed Palestinian movements in their country, or converted the Saiqa into a source of much irritation for Israel, but began using both of the Palestinian groups as means of influencing the PLO and other Arab governments.[15]

Another faction split from the PFLP in 1968 and established its own bases in Lebanon, Syria and Jordan. Ironically, the movement that named itself the Popular Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PDFLP; later just DFLP), and was led by Nayef Hawatmeh, was convinced that Habash focused on military matters too much: it not only condemned all attacks outside Israel, but also demanded the establishment of a People's Democratic Palestine in which Arabs and Jews would live without discrimination.

Following the Syrian pattern, several Arab governments began supporting 'their own' Palestinian groups – the biggest of which are listed in Table 2. Rather amazingly, these internal divisions and – often violent – disagreements between diverse Arab governments, between the PLO, the newly-created PLA and Saiqa in Syria, and between the PLO and the PFLP-GC in particular were completely ignored not only in the Arab world but by outside powers, too. Instead, Arafat's Fatah and PLO were frequently blamed for any attacks – and especially any misdeeds – regardless of what Palestinian factions had actually launched these, and who was actually in control. Indeed, even decades later groups like the PFLP-GC, Saiqa and the PLA were still widely considered to be 'members of the PLO'.[16]

Foremost, even the emergence of all these groups changed very little overall: while the PLO was successful in presenting itself as a legitimate liberation movement, and secured financial support, the majority of other groups became little other than useful tools for

all sorts of designs of diverse Arab governments. None had ever managed to build-up an effective military force, and even their capabilities as classic 'guerrillas' remained very limited; none became capable of running more than short-term raids into Israel, and thus none managed to attract the support of the Palestinian population there – and even less so to prompt a popular uprising. It is for this set of reasons that the strategy of several groups gradually shifted into what generally became known as 'international terrorism': attacks on Israeli or allied interests abroad by what were widely perceived as 'extremist groups' in an attempt to attract public attention about the plight of the Palestinians, but also to erode support for Israel.

THE WAR ON EAST GHOR CANAL

Following patterns from the mid-1950s, through October 1967, Israel began reporting a 'rapidly increasing' number of 'terrorist incidents' along the armistice line with Jordan. Like before, the vast majority of these actually consisted of unarmed Palestinians attempting to return to their possessions in the occupied West Bank. While even the US government commented on the 'intensity' of Palestinian activities only with descriptions like 'limited' and 'sporadic', and while several US intelligence reports stressed that the Palestinians were neither willing nor capable of, launching a major insurgency against Israel, Israeli officials remained insistent and began exploiting every opportunity to be 'provoked into retaliation'. Moreover, after repeatedly shelling refugee camps, causing scores of civilian casualties and further increasing the already widespread misery, the IDF resumed the Water War by targeting the East Ghor Canal.[17]

After failing to cut the canal by shelling in February 1968, in March of the same year the IDF ran a major assault on the PLO's HQ in Karameh. Although undertaken with the usual dash and despite Israel's claims about its success, this 15-hour-long operation ended in a fiasco: a US official informed Amman in advance, and both the Jordanian Army and the PLO put up fierce resistance. Although suffering heavier losses than the Israelis, and having their HQ completely destroyed, the Arabs knocked out about a dozen diverse vehicles, shot down a fighter jet and damaged at least one helicopter. Moreover, when Israel launched a follow-up air strike, two days later, the Jordanian air defences shot down another fighter-bomber. The crucial link providing water to the local population, to the Palestinian refugees and to the militants alike, remained intact. Concluding the problem required a different approach, between April and August 1968 the IDF ran a series of air- and commando-strikes on the East Ghor Canal. All the time propagating such operations as 'war on terrorism', it demolished entire sections of it. This tactic proved far more effective than actually combating the Palestinian militants: by September 1968, out of around 350,000 people that used to live on the Jordanian side of the Jordan River Valley before the June 1967 War, only 20,000 were left, while the PLO moved its bases into the mountains further east.[18]


Young members of a Palestinian guerrilla group at a training camp in Jordan in 1969. (Tom Cooper Collection)


A battery of 25-Pounders of the Jordanian Army in action during the Battle of Karameh. (Petra News Agency via Albert Grandolini)



The IDF/AF encountered unexpectedly stiff resistance and suffered numerous losses during the raid on the PLO's HQ in Karameh – to a degree where some Jordanian historians describe this battle as one that prevented the Israelis from grabbing a significant portion of their country east of the Jordan River. This is one of at least two Centurion main battle tanks (MBTs) knocked out during that battle. (Petra News Agency via Albert Grandolini)

PFLP'S FIRST STRIKE

Meanwhile, after reconstructing his armed forces and stabilising his economy with the help of contributions from the oil revenues of several Arab states, Egyptian president Nasser initiated what he called the 'War of Bloodletting' (also known as the 'War of Attrition') against Israeli positions along the Suez Canal, in 1968. Furthermore, in acknowledgment of the fact that the absence of the Palestinian element was one of the principal reasons for the failure of the Arab struggle against Israel – though much to the annoyance of the Jordanians, the Lebanese, and the Syrians – he began providing training and equipment to the Fatah. While visiting Moscow during the same year, Nasser took Arafat with him. The result was another irony: encouraged by the involvement of such leftist movements as the PFLP in the PLO, the Soviets convinced themselves that the Palestinians would be leaning towards the left, and began selling them arms and equipment, which were paid for by countries like Kuwait and Saudi Arabia from the income of sales of oil and gas to the West. In turn, the US support emboldened the Israelis to – in reaction to a series of infiltration attacks from Syria – attack bases of the PFLP-GC and Saiqa. Not to be outdone, Damascus ordered the two to hit back – through Lebanon.[19]

On 11 May 1968, the fedayeen rocketed the Kibbutz Margaliot, and the IDF retaliated by shelling the village of Houleh, in Lebanon. The Lebanese Army fired back and there was soon an extensive exchange of artillery fire from both sides, which was to go on through the summer and autumn. Damascus then sent the PFLP-GC to Lebanon and on 29 August they hijacked a TWA Boeing 707-331 at Beirut IAP. After forcing the pilot to land in Damascus, they ordered the 12 crew and 101 passengers out, before blowing up the airliner. Finding the idea attractive, the PFLP went a step further: on 26 December, two of its commandos machine-gunned a Boeing 707 of Israeli national airline El Al about to depart from Athens IAP, killing two. In retaliation, on the evening of 28 December 1968, the IDF deployed the Sayeret Matkal commandos into a heliborne attack on Beirut IAP, where these destroyed 14 passenger aircraft on the ground (including 1 Boeing 707-320C, 2 Sud Aviation SE.210 Caravelle, 2 Convair 990 Coronados, 1 Douglas DC-4, 1 Douglas DC-6, 2 Douglas DC-7, 3 de Havilland Comet, 1 Vickers VC.10, and 1 Vickers Viscount). All the airliners in question were carefully selected as being operated by the Middle East Airlines (MEA) and the Lebanese International Airways (LIA), both of which were identified as 'Arab owned'. Supposedly run as a 'signal' that Israel was prepared to strike at any Arab country from which terrorist attacks were launched against its citizens and interests, this raid was entirely pointless: not only that it hit no targets related to the PFLP-GC, or even the PLO, but it only caused major damage to the Lebanese tourist industry as this was on its way to recovery following the June 1967 War. Unsurprisingly, it drew a sharp rebuke even from the USA. Moreover, always considering itself a 'protector of Lebanon', Paris reacted by imposing a total arms embargo upon Israel, thus ending a period of nearly 20 years of strategic alliance.[20] Henceforth the USA – the government of which had been providing relatively indirect support since 1948 – became the primary and overt supporter and protector of Israel.[21]

CAIRO AGREEMENT

Of course, nothing of this contributed to the stabilisation of the situation in Lebanon. Therefore it was on the government of President Helou and the Lebanese armed forces to attempt bringing the Palestinian militants on their property under control. Completely ignoring the Syrian-supported PFLP-GC, they announced to the PLO – still headquartered in Jordan – a complete prohibition of further attacks across its borders. Predictably, Arafat rejected any attempts to restrict the activities of his organisation. As the related negotiations reached an impasse, on 2 May 1969 Helou issued orders for the Commander-in-Chief of the Lebanese armed forces, Major-General Boustany, to use 'all possible measures' to contain the fedayeen. As the troops moved in to clear the fedayeen from villages adjacent to Israel, the Palestinians opened fire and a seven-month war erupted. It was under such circumstances that the Lebanese air force suffered its first combat loss ever: while providing logistic support to the ground forces, one of its Aerospatiale SE.316B Alouette III helicopters (registration L-223) was hit by ground fire and forced to land. The helicopter was subsequently recovered and repaired.[22]

By October, Helou found himself facing not only the fedayeen, but also the majority of the Palestinian refugees that touted the slogan, 'never again'. The fighting resulted in many homes being destroyed and border villages abandoned. Moreover, Nasserist parties began erecting barricades in Beirut, nearly all of the Arab leaders denounced the Lebanese government, Syria closed its border and mobilised troops along it, while Iraq imposed economic sanctions. Eventually, Beirut was forced to negotiate under Egyptian supervision. The result was the Cairo Agreement, brokered by Nasser and signed by Yasser Arafat and the Chief-of-Staff of the

Lebanese Army, General Emil Bustani on 2 November 1969. This not only removed the 16 official UNRWA camps – home to between 300,000 and 500,000 Palestinian refugees – from Lebanese jurisdiction, but also established principles under which the presence and activities of the PLO were to be tolerated by the government in Beirut. Henceforth, the Palestinians were legally in control of their refugee camps in Lebanon, free to recruit their residents, and launch attacks against Israel at their own discretion. Indeed, the PFLP was quick to establish a presence in almost every single camp, while numerous other groups – including the Saiqa – became active, too. This was the beginning of the direct Palestinian involvement in Lebanese politics.[23]

CURIOUS ONLOOKERS

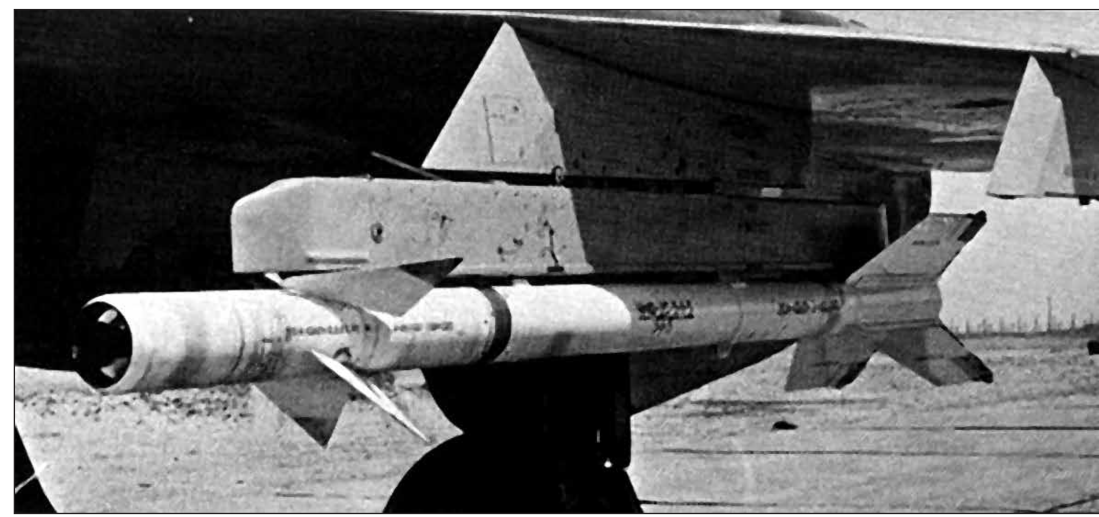
Preoccupied with rebuilding its military and the power struggle between Atassi, Jadid and Assad, for most of 1969 and 1970, Syria played the role of a 'curious onlooker'. However, it did not take long before the build-up of the Saiqa and the PLA attracted the attention of the IDF. On 12 February 1969, the Israelis bombed two 'major Arab guerrilla bases' in Syria, and claimed one of two SyAAF MiG-21s scrambled in response as shot down. Knowing his military was not ready for another major clash, but keen to maintain Syria's position of a key player, Assad cautioned his commanders into better coordination of their operations. Gradually, they began to learn how to combine fedayeen attacks into Israel with putting the SyAAF on alert for Israeli retaliation raids, and then letting its interceptors operate according to carefully prepared plans. Ultimately, this process became the Syrian strategy under which Damascus used its Palestinian proxies to maintain a presence and then dominance in Lebanon, thwart movement towards any kind of negotiations between the Arabs and Israel, and also to extract financial support from states like Saudi Arabia – and eliminate Syrian dissidents.[24]

On 24 February 1969, the IDF/AF bombed two fedayeen bases in what was meanwhile the Yarmouk District of southern Damascus. The SyAAF reacted by scrambling four nimble MiG-17Fs with the aim of distracting attention of escorting Mirage IIICJ interceptors in a dogfight, and then brought in four MiG-21s to catch the enemy off guard and attack with air-to-air missiles. The plot worked, but the Soviet-made R-3S air-to-air missiles (ASCC/NATO-codename 'AA-2 Atoll') did not: at least two were fired but both failed to hit. In turn, the Israelis shot down two MiG-17Fs. The Syrians tried again: on 4 July 1969 a fedayeen of the PFLP-GC placed three pounds of explosives under the manifold of eight pipelines carrying oil from the Haifa refinery to the dockside. The detonation cut three pipelines and caused a fire that destroyed over 1,500 tonnes of refined oil. In retaliation, four days later the IDF/AF hit four Palestinian bases in Syria: when the SyAAF attempted to set up another ambush for the Mirages, the Israelis reacted by deploying strong electronic countermeasures, entirely spoiling the Syrian plan that depended on vectoring their interceptors with help of ground-based radars and intercept-controllers. As a consequence, the Israelis claimed seven MiG-21s as shot down for no loss in return. The Syrian sources confirmed the loss of two jets in air combat, and one in a crash landing, and the death of two of their pilots.[25]

On 6 January 1970, the IDF/AF 'introduced' its brand-new, US-made and vastly superior McDonnell Douglas F-4E Phantom II fighter-bombers to Syria by sending a formation of these to fly supersonic over Damascus. Two days later, it set up an ambush for the SyAAF and claimed three MiG-21s as shot down over Sanamain: the Syrians acknowledged one loss, in turn claiming one Israeli as shot down. Following this success, an Israeli official claimed that the airspace of his country would be 'impenetrable to Arab attacks'. Determined to prove this a lie, Assad ordered the best pilot from the premiere SyAAF interceptor unit, No. 67 Squadron, Major Mohammad Mansour to 'hit back'. Mansour passed low over southern Lebanon before swooping in from the sea and then breaking the sound barrier directly over downtown Haifa, at 16.04hrs on 9 January 1970 – shattering thousands of windows in the process and shocking much of the population. Of course, the IDF/AF retaliated the same evening, sending Phantoms to repeat the exercise over Damascus, Homs, Lattakia, Hamah and even Aleppo – but without leaving lasting impressions: officers of the SyAAF were perfectly satisfied that for the first time since the June 1967 War, an Arab combat aircraft had penetrated Israeli airspace and returned undisturbed.

BATTLE OF RACHAYA

On 21 February 1970, a bomb planted by the PFLP-GC detonated on a Convair CV-990 of Swissair underway from Zürich for Tel Aviv. Although the crew retained control for several minutes longer, the aircraft crashed while attempting to return, killing all 47 occupants. On the same day, a Sud Aviation Caravelle operated by Austrian Airlines was damaged by another bomb after taking-off from Frankfurt, but the crew managed to land safely. On 8 May 1970, the PFLP infiltrated Israel via Lebanon to ambush a school bus near a settlement called Avivim, in northern Galilee: subjected to murderous gunfire, the vehicle crashed into an embankment and overturned, the militants shooting at it all the time. Twelve people on board – including nine children – were murdered, and 25 wounded.[26] Enraged, the Israelis shelled four Lebanese villages, the same afternoon, killing 20 and wounding 40 civilians, before launching an offensive against fedayeen bases up to 16 kilometres



The principal problem of the major Arab air forces in the late 1960s and early 1970s was the lack of an effective air-to-air weapon: the Soviet made R-3S (ASCC/NATO-codename 'AA-2 Atoll'), visible on this photograph was a poor weapon, entirely unsuitable for air combat. Yet, without improved effectiveness in the air, the Arabs could not hope to reach a strategic balance with Israel on the ground either. (Tom Cooper Collection)



Due to issues with MiG-21s caused by poor performance of R-3S-missiles, in 1969 and 1970 the SyAAF repeatedly attempted to counter Israeli aerial superiority with older MiG-17Fs, one of which is shown in this photograph. Although nimble, and relatively survivable, the type proved no match of faster and better armed F-4Es and Mirage IIICJs, and could barely hold its own in air combat with the A-4 Skyhawk. (Pit Weinert Collection)



Farewell ceremony for Colonel Fayez Ashraf Mansour, held in Damascus on 14 May 1970. (R. S. Collection)

deep into the rugged foothills of Mount Jebel Sheikh – meanwhile known as the 'Fatahland'. In face of light resistance of the Palestinians and the Lebanese army, an IDF raiding party advanced 8km (5 miles) deep before turning east in attempt to encircle the targeted area and eliminate the militants. Beirut requested help from Damascus and Hafez al-Assad replied in the affirmative, ordering his forces to coordinate their action with the Lebanese. His Deputy Commander SyAAF, Brigadier General Naji Jamil, ordered the CO of the Air Brigade 7, Colonel Fayez Hafez Ashraf Mansour, to attack the Israeli ground troops with MiG-17Fs: these were to be followed by the Hunters of the FAL, while Syrian MiG-21s were to provide top cover.[27]

Although carefully planned, the operation fell apart soon after it was initiated. As two formations of Syrian MiG-17s entered the Lebanese airspace, on 12 May 1970, the FAL Hunters failed to appear, while – because the SyAAF had next to no radar coverage of the area – the escorting MiG-21s became entangled with Israeli interceptors. Mansour's section of four fighter-bombers thus became involved in air combats with several McDonnell Douglas A-4 Skyhawks of the IDF/AF, and then with additional Mirages. After losing the aircraft flown by 1st Lieutenant Ali Subhi, Mansour ordered a return to Syria. While trying to protect his less experienced wingmen from Israeli fighters, he became involved in an air combat with two Skyhawks. After claiming both of these as shot down, according to Syrian sources, he then came under attack by two Mirages, was shot down and killed. Fayez Mansour's body was found by a heliborne search party of the SyAAF, and brought back to Almazza, later the same day. In what subsequently became known as the 'Battle of Rachaya' in Syria, the SyAAF thus lost one of its most experienced and most respected fighter pilots.[28]

In attempt to demonstrate Syrian determination but also to improve the morale of the ground forces, on 24 June 1970, Assad ordered an attack on the IDF positions in the central sector of the Purple Line. While catching the Israelis by surprise and gaining some early success, this assault provoked a fierce response from the IDF/AF. On the next day, the Israelis bombed refugee camps around Damascus; on 26 June, their ground forces – supported by air strikes and artillery barrage – hit the Syrian northern flank, broke through and then turned south in an attempt to isolate the assaulting force. According to the Syrians, this move was expected and ran straight into an artillery ambush: hit by withering fire the Israeli counterattack was stopped cold and then forced to withdraw. While the IDF subsequently claimed to have destroyed 49 Syrian bunkers, knocked out 30 MBTs and to have captured several dozens of troops, Damascus admitted the loss of 20 soldiers and claimed the destruction of at least a dozen Israeli tanks. In the air, the SyAAF continued suffering problems caused by its poor radar coverage and Soviet-made R-3S missiles. Its MiG-17F-units lost the jet flown by 1st Lieutenant Yunus Abdullah al-Lagamy, while No. 67 Squadron managed to shoot down one Mirage IIICJ – the pilot of which was captured – but lost the jet flown by Colonel Ahmad Adnan Yusuf Nablsy.[29]

Worse yet, on 26 September 1970, the SyAAF lost another highly experience pilot, when Colonel Bassam Hamshu – the first Syrian pilot credited with downing an F-4E Phantom II – was shot down by Syrian ground fire, apparently while returning from

a reconnaissance sortie over the Golan Heights. Similarly, while claiming two Mirages as shot down on 11 October 1970, the Syrian air force lost the aircraft flown by 1st Lieutenant Tayseer Elyas Badeen in return.[30]

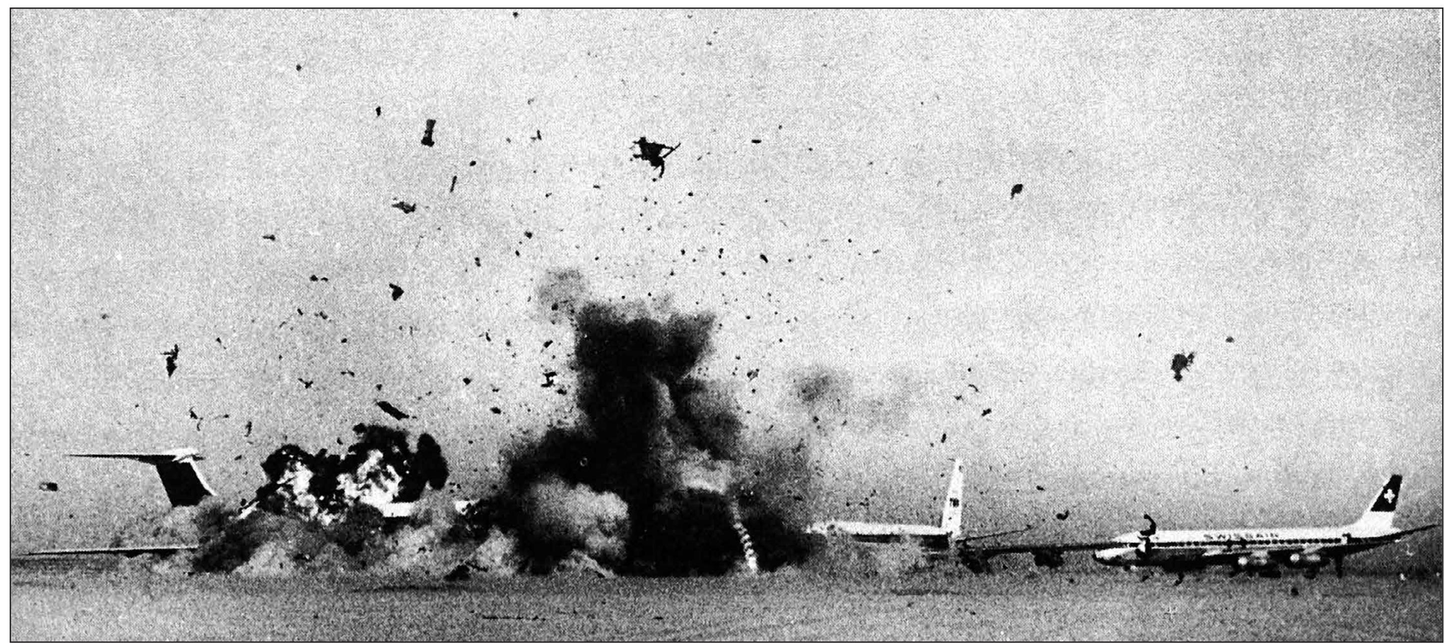
BLACK SEPTEMBER

By the mid-1970s the pattern of what was going on in the triangle between Lebanon, Syria and Jordan was quite obvious. Despite the Cairo Agreement, the Lebanese government remained preoccupied with suppressing the Palestinians. The Syrian government retained its position of openly supporting a few selected groups of Palestinians as long as these were doing what it wanted, but – no matter how eager to do so – its armed forces were hopelessly out of position to openly challenge the IDF and thus support a popular uprising inside Israel. Unable to bringing the Palestinian militants on its soil under control, the position of the Jordanian armed forces remained shaky: the Fatah and the PFLP in Jordan continued growing in numbers even if not in capability. Eventually, the situation encouraged the leadership of the PLO to plot the creation of a 'state within a state' inside Jordan. Obviously, such ideas were an anathema for King Hussein: transplanted from Mecca to Amman by the British in the 1918-1920 period, the Hashemite monarchs never felt entirely secure in their kingdom – even less so as by the late 1960s nearly a third of the armed forces consisted of Palestinian refugees, and disputes between them and officers of fiercely loyal Bedouin origin were already eroding morale in many units. After surviving at least two assassination attempts, on 1 September 1970 King Hussein assumed personal command.[31]

The PFLP then added oil to the fire: on 6 September 1970, it simultaneously hijacked a Swissair Douglas DC-9, a TWA Boeing 707, and a Pan Am Boeing 747 underway over southern Europe. The 747 was flown to Cairo, where it was blown up the next day, after the passengers and crew had been disembarked. The other aircraft were all taken to Dawson's Field, a disused aerodrome some 50km (31 miles) outside Amman. There, the militants and their hostages were joined by a BOAC VC10, hijacked en route from Bahrain to



On 6 September 1970 the PFLP attempted to hijack four international airliners. Three of the attempts succeeded and two aircraft landed at Dawson's Field (renamed 'Revolution Airstrip' by the Fedayeen), about 50km (31 miles) outside Amman. Here the passengers were held hostage while negotiations continued for their release. (Photo by Gordon Clark)



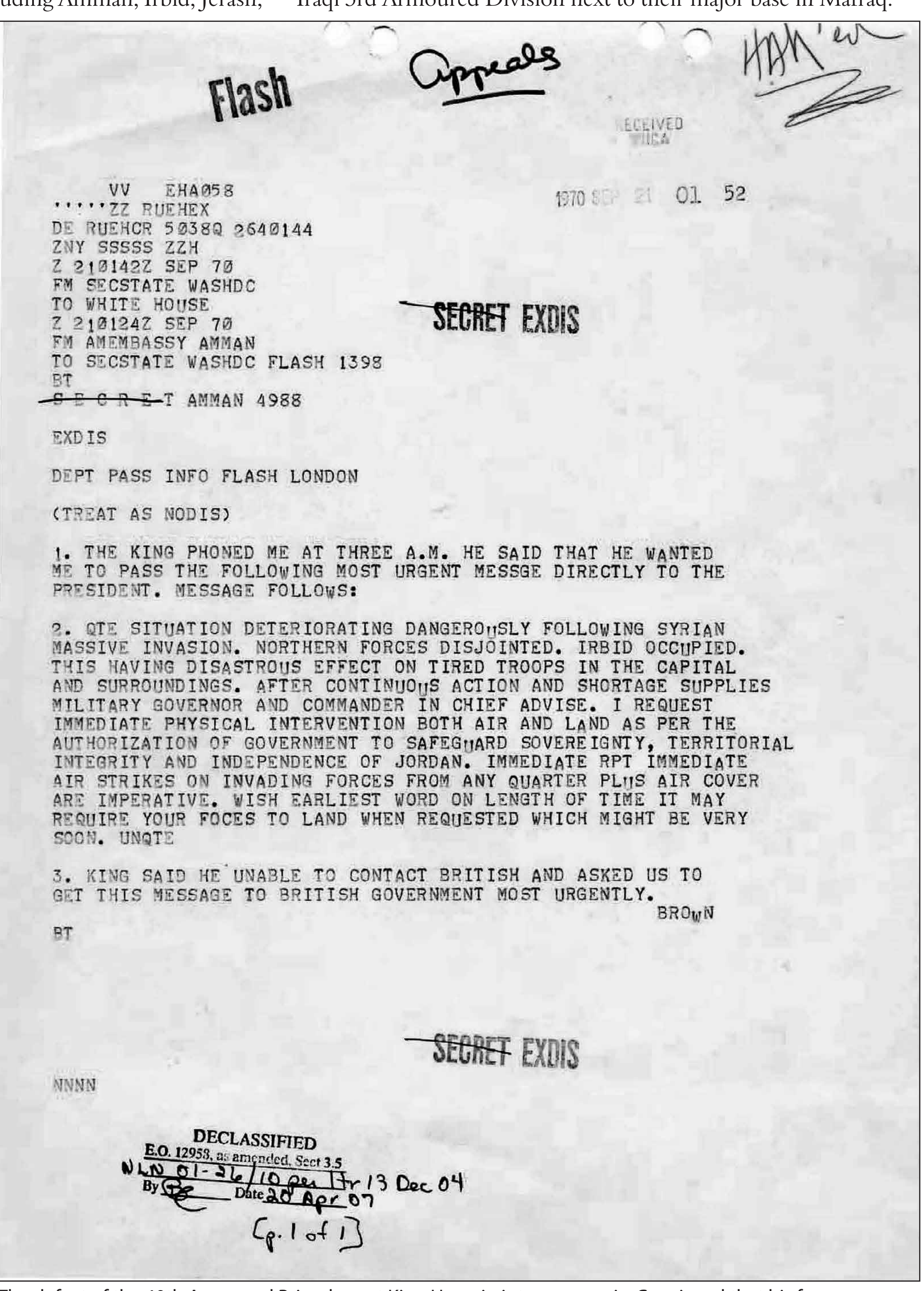
Following the failure of negotiations, on 12 September 1970 the PFLP blew up the empty airliners at Dawson's Field. (UPI)

London on 9 September. In exchange for the release of more than 400 hostages, the Palestinians demanded the release of a number of their comrades held in jails in Western Europe. The Jordanian Army ringed Dawson's Field, but granted permission for the PFLP to remove the passengers and crews. After realising their demands would not be met, the Palestinians released the hostages and blew up all the three airliners on 12 September in the full presence of the world-wide media.[32]

This was the drop that over spilled the barrel. On 17 September 1970, King Hussein ordered his armed forces into action. Expecting the poorly-trained Palestinians to falter and flee and planning a '48-hour blitzkrieg', the Jordanian Army quickly surrounded the cities with a known PLO presence, including Amman, Irbid, Jerash, as-Salt and Zaraq. However, for unexplainable reasons, the Jordanian generals assigned the more open areas to their infantry formations, and densely populated urban centres to their armour formations – with unavoidable consequences. The 1st Infantry Division experienced relatively few problems while encircling and then mopping up southern Amman. However, when the 60th Armoured Brigade and elements of the 4th Mechanised Division shelled the Wehdat and Hussein refugee camps and then drove into the Old City of Amman it experienced a nasty surprise. The majority of the fedayeen had little – or no – military training, only rudimentary organisation, and next to no discipline: while officially assigned to the PLO, PFLP or Fatah, they were actually divided into countless groups, fronts and factions, with overlapping and shifting loyalties. However, they were well-equipped with Soviet-made RPG-7s, and ready for the showdown. By the morning of 18 September 1970, the 4th Mechanised has suffered heavy losses and stopped cold. It became obvious that the fedayeen would have to be expulsed in house-to-house fighting.[33]

SYRIAN INVASION

The situation in northern Jordan was even worse. The 2nd Infantry Division and the 40th Armoured Brigade not only failed to clear Irbid, ar-Ramtha and Ajloun, but both units suffered from desertions. The commander (CO) of the 2nd Infantry Division resigned his command in protest over the order to open fire at the refugee camps and defected to Syria together with about 200 of his officers and other ranks. Moreover, late in the evening of 17 September, the troops holding the northern part of the town of ar-Ramtha came under attack from their rear: although the deployment of the Syrian 5th Infantry Division – including two armoured brigades, a reinforced brigade of the PLA, and a Commando Brigade – was known for days and constantly monitored even by US intelligence services, when its troops actually crossed the border with the intention of helping the Palestinians, they took the Jordanians by surprise. Moreover, while the Army had its hands full fighting on the ground, the Royal Jordanian Air Force (RJAF) was not even put on alert: even so, it's leading officers were primarily preoccupied with petty bickering and concerns about the presence of the troops of the 12,000-strong Iraqi 3rd Armoured Division next to their major base in Mafraq.[34]



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DEPT PASS INFO FLASH LONDON

(TREAT AS NODIS)

1. THE KING PHONED ME AT THREE A.M. HE SAID THAT HE WANTED ME TO PASS THE FOLLOWING MOST URGENT MESSGE DIRECTLY TO THE PRESIDENT. MESSAGE FOLLOWS:

2. QTE SITUATION DETERIORATING DANGEROUSLY FOLLOWING SYRIAN MASSIVE INVASION. NORTHERN FORCES DISJOINTED. IRBID OCCUPIED. THIS HAVING DISASTROUS EFFECT ON TIRED TROOPS IN THE CAPITAL AND SURROUNDINGS. AFTER CONTINUOUS ACTION AND SHORTAGE SUPPLIES MILITARY GOVERNOR AND COMMANDER IN CHIEF ADVISE. I REQUEST IMMEDIATE PHYSICAL INTERVENTION BOTH AIR AND LAND AS PER THE AUTHORIZATION OF GOVERNMENT TO SAFEGUARD SOVEREIGNTY, TERRITORIAL INTEGRITY AND INDEPENDENCE OF JORDAN. IMMEDIATE RPT IMMEDIATE AIR STRIKES ON INVADING FORCES FROM ANY QUARTER PLUS AIR COVER ARE IMPERATIVE. WISH EARLIEST WORD ON LENGTH OF TIME IT MAY REQUIRE YOUR FOCES TO LAND WHEN REQUESTED WHICH MIGHT BE VERY SOON. UNQTE

3. KING SAID HE UNABLE TO CONTACT BRITISH AND ASKED US TO GET THIS MESSAGE TO BRITISH GOVERNMENT MOST URGENTLY.

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E.O. 12958, as amended, Sect 3.5
NLN 01-36/10 per Itr 13 Dec 04
By ___ Date 20 Apr 07
[p. 1 of 1]

The defeat of the 40th Armoured Brigade sent King Hussein into near panic. Convinced that his forces were on the verge of defeat, he was not too proud to plead for help from any quarter — including Israel — as documented by several messages from this critical period in Jordan's history. This is a copy of a telegram from the US Embassy in Amman to the US Secretary of State, dated 21 September 1970. (via Tom Long)

Fearing Syria might be supported by the USSR, US President Nixon ordered three carrier battle groups of the US Navy's 6th Fleet into the Eastern Mediterranean, and put on alert several airborne units of the US Army stationed in the USA and in West Germany. Preoccupied with the battle in Aman, King Hussein and his generals were slow to react: on the morning of 20 September the 5th Infantry Division thus decimated a company of Jordanian Army's Centurion tanks near the critical intersection of the roads linking Irbid with Mafraq and ar-Ramtha and Amman, opening the way for a brigade of the PLA to march on Irbid and support the PLO there. Only at that point in time were the 25th Infantry Brigade and the 40th Armoured Brigade of the Jordanian Army ordered to re-deploy and counter the new threat. Moreover, Hussein urgently appealed to the USA and UK for help. However, London not only refused to intervene militarily, but also strongly counselled against American intervention — and a similar position was expressed by several other European allies. Alarmed, Hussein then requested Washington to arrange for an Israeli intervention against Syria. The government in Tel Aviv responded that it was ready to do so, but — following its recent experiences with the Soviets in Egypt — wanted to know how the US would react if Egypt and the USSR became involved as well. While President Nixon ordered his National Security Adviser, Henry Kissinger, to work out contingency plans for a joint, US-Israeli intervention, he ascertained to King Hussein that, 'there was no need to worry about Israel': while quietly effecting a partial mobilisation, the IDF had no plan to cross the River Jordan.[35]

BATTLE ON KITIM-AN-NU'AYMAH RIDGE

Late in the afternoon of 20 September, the Jordanian 40th Armoured and 25th Infantry Brigades took up defensive positions along the southern wall of the Valley of ar-Ramtha and along the main road to Amman, blocking the Syrian route south. The next morning, the Syrians launched a luke-warm attack that resulted in quite some exchange of fire and may have caused the loss of up to a dozen MBTs on each side, before the Jordanians felt forced to withdraw south. The Syrian armour thus reached ar-Ramtha crossroads and linked up with the fedayeen that held Irbid.

Although a section of four Hawker Hunter FGA.Mk 73 fighter-bombers flew over the battlefield early on the morning of 20 September, they did not open fire: the troops of the Iraqi 3rd Armoured Division deployed near Mafraq Air Base (subsequently renamed into 'Muwaffaq as-Salti Air Base') – together with numerous groups of the fedayeen – fired upon the aircraft as these were taking off. Therefore, Mafraq was declared as 'untenable' and the RJAF were ordered not to launch again in order to avoid provoking the Iraqis. Alarmed by such reports, King Hussein made a call to Baghdad, only to have the Iraqi Vice-Premier and the CO of the Iraqi Air Force, Hardan at-Tikriti, advise him to remove the fighter bombers because he could not prevent his soldiers from shooting at them. Thus warned, Hussein ordered the 99th Infantry brigade to deploy vis-à-vis the Iraqi ground troops: the unit thus bought the time necessary for the RJAF to evacuate all the Hawker Hunters of its No. 1 and No. 6 Squadron to H-5 airfield.

On the morning of 22 September 1970, King Hussein finally felt free to order the RJAF into action. Scrambled from H-5, the first two Hunters hit a Syrian column attacking Jordanian forces on the Kitim-an-Nu'aymah ridge, and knocked out several vehicles using Hispano-Suisa HS.80 unguided rockets. Half an hour later, a formation of eight Hunters repeated this attack, followed by another formation of eight Hunters. The fourth Jordanian formation hit the units of the 5th Division around noon with – reportedly – an 'even more devastating' effect, because the pilots that flew the first series of strikes provided a very precise description of the situation on the ground. Taken by surprise, the Syrians stopped their advance while regrouping – only to find themselves on the receiving end of additional air strikes. Later in the afternoon, the Syrians suddenly began withdrawing towards the border. Jadid's attempt to stop the retreat through the deployment of an additional armoured brigade failed to change the situation: by the time this unit reached the border, the 5th Infantry Division was already back inside Syria. The RJAF later claimed to have launched more than 200 combat sorties on this day and to have destroyed 62 main battle tanks (MBTs), 60 armoured personnel carriers (APCs), dozens of trucks, and to have killed and wounded around 600 SyAA and PLA troops. Several of about 25 Hunter-pilots involved may have flown four, some up to eight sorties that day. However, the Jordanians never provided any kind of evidence in support of such claims. Indeed, the few photographs of the battlefield subsequently released actually show their own Centurion MBTs – some knocked out and others perfectly intact.

On the contrary, there is strong evidence that the actual reason for the Syrian withdrawal was the ongoing power struggle in Damascus. Correspondingly, the Syrian Minister of Defence, Lieutenant-General Hafez al-Assad, correctly concluded that an all-out invasion of Jordan would prompt an Israeli and/or US counter-intervention. Therefore, he left Atassi and Jadid ordered the 5th Infantry Division and the PLA into Jordan, while not only holding back the SyAAF, but then also ordering a withdrawal of the ground troops. This version is – indirectly – supported by the obvious lack of aerial support for the Syrian intervention: in the course of the entire Black September, not a single SyAAF aircraft entered Jordanian airspace. The sole RJAF Hunter shot down during the battle on Kitim-an-Nu'aymah Ridge was hit by ground fire. Its pilot, Samir Shurafa, ejected safely and was taken to Syria as a prisoner.[36]

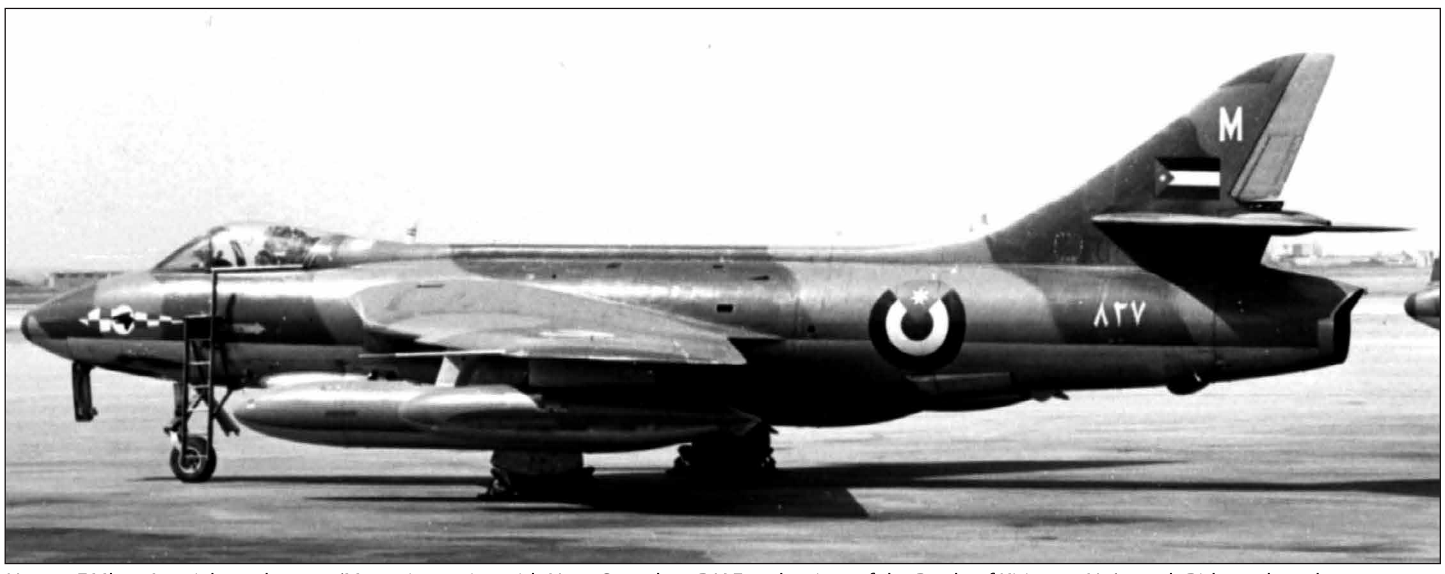
RECOVERING AMMAN

With the Syrians in full retreat, the Jordanian monarch found himself exposed to immense public pressure: not only that his Prime Minister Muhammad Daoud defected to Libya, but the Arab media blamed him for 'massacring the Palestinians'. Therefore, he accepted a ceasefire brokered by Nasser: on 27 September 1970, King Hussein signed an agreement with Yasser Arafat according to which the Jordanian Army was to regain control of key cities and intersections, while all factions of the PLO were to undertake a rapid and complete withdrawal from Jordan into southern Lebanon. On 13 October 1970, Arafat and Hussein signed another agreement, mandating the fedayeen to respect Jordanian sovereignty and desist from wearing uniforms or bearing arms in public. In turn, Jordan officially recognized the PLO as the sole official representative of the Palestinians, thus officially ending its pretentions of acting as their representative. However, not all the fedayeen – especially not those from the PFLP – were ready to accept such agreements. Correspondingly, between November 1970 and January 1971 the new Prime Minister of the Jordanian government, Wasfi Tal, ordered the armed forces into further offensives against the bases of the Palestinian militants in the Amman area. Led by Brigadier-General Sharif Zayid Ibn Shakir (the king's cousin and the Deputy Chief-of-Staff Operations of the Jordanian Army), the operation went on for months. At first, it resulted in destruction of numerous bases along the Amman-Jerash road; next, the Army recovered Irbid in several days of brutal, house-to-house combat, in March. Hopelessly outgunned, the remaining militants were forced to re-

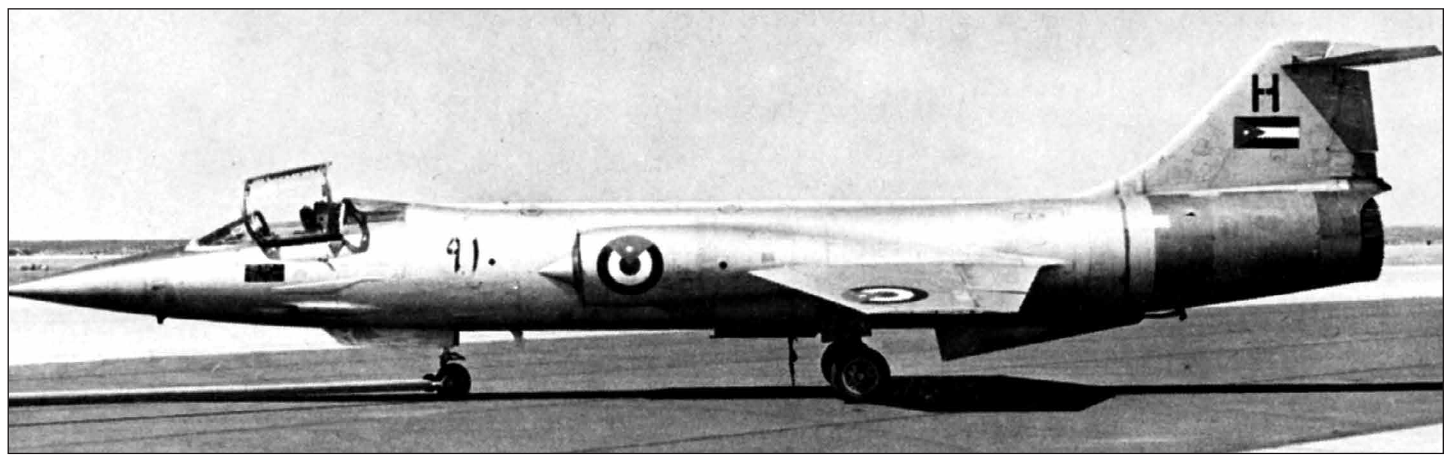
locate all of their bases to the forests between Aljoun and Jerash, where Habash founded the Free Jordan Movement with the aim of overthrowing King Hussein. In July 1971, the Army – meanwhile partially re-equipped with US-made M48 MBTs – surrounded and then assaulted the last 2,000 fedayeen entrenched in Tel al-Aqra (also 'Ras al-Agra'): scores were killed on both sides before the surviving fedayeen surrendered. On 17 July 1971, King Hussein staged a press conference to announce that Jordanian sovereignty had been completely restored, and that there, 'was no problem now'.[37]

REPERCUSSIONS

The events that became known as 'Black September' within the Palestinian diaspora resulted in the emergence of another militant organisation: the Black September group was established by members of the Fatah with the aim of running reprisal operations on the international scene. On 28 November 1971, they assassinated Wasfi Tal in Cairo, and subsequently ran several attacks inside Jordan, and against Israeli and Western citizens and property around the Middle East. However, Black September also led to the resumption of secret, high-level meetings between King Hussein and Israeli leaders. In complete secrecy, the monarch agreed to make peace —



Hunter F.Mk 73A serial number 827/M was in service with No. 1 Squadron RJAF at the time of the Battle of Kitim-an-Nu'aymah Ridge, when the type may have proven highly successful in blunting the Syrian invasion of Jordan in support of Palestinian fedayeen. (Albert Grandolini Collection)



Lockheed F-104A Starfighters were in service with No. 9 Squadron, RJAF, since 1969. Seemingly used as interceptors, they saw no action in September 1970. However, two years later, two may have been involved in intercepting a Hunter that attacked the Alouette III helicopter carrying King Hussein. (Albert Grandolini Collection)



A row of SE.316 Alouette III helicopters of the Royal Jordanian Air Force. While carrying King Hussein, one of these was attacked by the Hunter flown by 1st Lieutenant Talal Mohammed al-Khatib on 9 November 1972, and nearly shot down. (Albert Grandolini Collection)



President Nasser (centre) brokering a ceasefire with PLO's Chairman Arafat (left) and King Hussein (right), in Cairo, on 27 September 1970. Only a day later, Nasser died from a heart attack. (Albert Grandolini Collection)

in exchange for US military and economic aid provided with the explanation of 'preventing Jordan from buying Soviet arms'.[38]

To show him what he could expect, the Pentagon immediately organised a small airlift to Dawson's Field, in late 1971, which served to replenish Jordanian stocks of ammunition. Furthermore, the US donated four C-119s to the RJAF, and provided equipment for a radar station that was constructed at H-5. Much more was to follow in 1972 and after, especially in regard to the RJAF, which received an entirely new support infrastructure constructed and developed by the Americans in the two years that followed. With this, the country that Israel once feared the most on account of its military effectiveness during the war of 1948 and the huge concentration of Palestinian refugees, was henceforth largely out of the business of fighting wars with Israel. Certainly enough, not all the officers of the Jordanian armed forces were in agreement with this development. On 9 November 1972, 1st Lieutenant Talal Mohammed al-Khatib attacked and almost shot down the Aerospatiale SE.316B helicopter carrying King Hussein, while flying a Hunter. The monarch's pilot managed a relatively 'soft' landing, and the King ended up in hospital with bruises and shrapnel injuries. In turn, two Lockheed F-104A Starfighters from No. 9 Squadron RJAF are believed to have intercepted and shot down Khatib's fighter jet.[39]

If there was any positive development in all of this, this was the fate of the East Ghor Canal. Largely demolished by Israeli air strikes of 1969 and 1970, and abandoned by the USA, this was subsequently completed with funding from Arab states in the Persian Gulf, and became one of the most successful development projects in the history of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan.

CHAPTER 3
MILITARY BUILD-UP

For reasons listed in the first two chapters, although frequently presented as the 'IV Arab-Israeli War', and usually limited to the period between 6 and 12 June 1982, the Israeli invasion of Lebanon 1982 was not a 'stand alone' affair, and even less so the first clash between the IDF, the armed forces of Lebanon and Syria, diverse armed Palestinian groups, and the dozens of factions into which Lebanese society degenerated upon the outbreak of the civil war in that country. The Israeli invasion of Lebanon in 1982 was also not the first time the IDF faced militant and guerrilla movements organised into para-military structures, as pointed out by some Israeli historians. Finally, it was no affair that 'simply happened', especially not alone due to the Palestinian irredentism and intransigence, or because Israel would have been 'dragged into another war'. On the contrary, it took decades of wholesale ignorance of the core issue on hand – the status of Palestinian refugees and their demands for an independent, sovereign state – and a massive investment by all of the involved parties into their armed forces. Moreover, it took years of mutual provocations and – tragically – many atrocities for Lebanon to virtually explode in the face of all parties involved, in the period 1975-1982. A crucial role in this process concerned the military build-up of three – nominally – conventional armed forces: those of Israel, Lebanon and Syria.

ISRAEL DEFENCE FORCE[1]

Formally established on 28 May 1948, the Israeli Defence Force had its origins in three political and militant organisations that, depending on one's point of view, are frequently judged as either 'genuine freedom fighters' or 'prototypes of modern-day terrorists'. These were the Haganah, formed in 1920 and systematically developed into a nucleus of a future army; the Irgun, a radical leftist group that emerged in 1937; and the Palmach, the actual direct forerunner of the IDF, largely consisting of former members of the Jewish Brigade that fought for Great Britain during the Second World War.

With Israel officially being 'encircled by hostile neighbours sworn to destroy it', the IDF quickly assumed the primary responsibility for the survival of the state, resulting in a heavily militarised nation. While assimilating a cosmopolitan mix of people from more than 60 countries and speaking at least 20 different languages, it played (and still plays) a crucial role in nation building, education and the indoctrination of Israel's citizens. Moreover, already by the early 1960s it developed into a tightly integrated organisation where there was no separate air force, ground force, or army. While the control of the IDF was vested in the Prime Minister and the Cabinet, direct responsibility and command were located in the Chief-of-Staff and every-day-operations run by the General Staff, a unified command ascertaining a flexible, yet neatly coordinated flow of operations and the maximum application of combat power. The form of the IDF emerged from its origins and its experiences of the wars in 1947-1949, 1956, and 1967. The active force served as a mobilisation base and the first line of defence: as of the early 1970s, it consisted of about 75,000 personnel, including the active cadre of about 11,500 and two yearly conscript classes of around 25,000 each. Men of 18-29 years of age served 36 months and unmarried women 18-26 years of age served 20 months from their 18th birthday; service in the reserves was required up to age 55 for men and 34 for women. The IDF was up to a strength of 275,000 when fully mobilised, organized


A Vautour II fighter-bomber passing low over a group of Centurion MBTs during the June 1967 War. (Albert Grandolini Collection)

into an equivalent of eight mechanised divisions and two paratroop brigades, equipped with more than 1,000 Centurion, M48, M50/51, M60 and T-54/55 main battle tanks (MBTs), over 1,500 M3, M113, and BTR-50/OT-62 armoured personnel carriers (APCs), and supported by more than 300 self-propelled artillery pieces.

Ever since its coming into being, Israel never ceased complaining about the 'lack of space': correspondingly, its military had no space to afford warning time against an air attack and no space to trade for time or in which to manoeuvre against an invading army. Ironically, such complaints could be heard even once the June 1967 War moved Israel's boundaries well outwards. Actually, for at least the first decade of its existence, the nascent nation had next to no economy and was financially unsustainable, surviving only thanks to numerous foreign loans, US financial aid and German reparations. Nominally, the combination of these factors resulted in the national strategy of defence based on 'pre-emptive' operations against outside threats, aimed to gain quick and decisive victories in order to limit any potential damage for Israel. In reality, Israeli military leaders were quick in realizing the inherent weaknesses of their neighbours and, thanks to their readiness to test and innovate, systematically worked on establishing the country in a position of military hegemony over the entire Middle East – precisely as planned since 1947, and realized in June 1967. Shortly before the latter conflict, the country crossed the so-called 'nuclear threshold': i.e. weaponised its first two or three nuclear weapons, and henceforth its principal defence strategy became that of deterrence: Israel was supposed to become so overwhelmingly superior, that nobody would dare attacking it; indeed, that it could always negotiate from the position of clear superiority.

ISRAEL DEFENCE FORCE/ AIR FORCE

The original Israeli military air services, the Irgun-run Palestine Flying Service and the Haganah-controlled *Aviron* came into being in 1937 and 1947, respectively, and operated a miscellany of light civilian types and a few transports, reinforced by numerous AOP Austers left behind by the British. Officially established on 28 May 1948, the IDF/AF took over a selection of first-class air bases constructed by the Royal Air Force since the First World War, and rapidly expanded through the semi-clandestine acquisition of about 300 aircraft from Czechoslovakia, Great Britain, France, the USA and elsewhere. The resulting miscellany of North American P-51 Mustangs, Supermarine Spitfires and numerous other types enabled it to establish itself in a position of aerial dominance over all of its neighbours, but post-war development was curtailed by overdependence on non-Jewish personnel and severe financial limitations. The latter issue experienced a dramatic change due to The Reparations Agreement between Israel and the Federal Republic of Germany of March 1953, under which West Germany paid for losses in Jewish livelihood and property during the Holocaust. As well as financing the construction of the NWC, the same payments enabled the IDF/AF to acquire its first jets in the form of British-made Gloster Meteor F.Mk 8, T.Mk 7, NF.Mk 13s and FR.Mk 9s, during the same year. After failing to purchase North American F-86F Sabres (or their Canadair-built CL-13B Sabre F.Mk 6 equivalent), in 1955, the Israelis placed an order for 6 Dassault MD.452 Mystère IIs: because of postponements in development of that type, the French then delivered the first 12 Dassault MD.450 Ouragans, as a stop-gap measure. By 1956, Paris agreed to supply a total of 36 Dassault MD.454 Mystère IVAs, and bring the total of Ouragans to 50, while during the Suez War of the same year it also deployed two complete wings of its fighter-bombers to Israel, from where they flew combat sorties against Egypt while wearing Israeli national markings.[2]

The 'French period' of the IDF/AF was continued through late 1950s and early 1960s with an order for Fouga CM.170R Magister jet trainers (with secondary attack capability), 24 Dassault Super Mystère B.2 (SMB.2), 28 Sud Aviation SO.4050 Vautour II interceptors and fighter-bombers, and then a total of 70 Dassault Mirage IIICJ fighter-bombers, 2 Mirage IIIRJ photo-reconnaissance aircraft and 4 Mirage IIIBJ conversion trainers with combat capability, all delivered by 1967. However, the primary concern of the entire IDF throughout this period remained the country's inability to establish an industrial base adequate to produce heavy weapons systems – like supersonic aircraft, missiles, tanks and heavy artillery. Development of such capabilities was to take much more



Supposedly based on 'espionage', the 'IAI Nesher' was actually the result of a clandestine operation in which Dassault and the Rockwell Corporation from the USA agreed to transfer 51 French-manufactured Mirage 5Js to Israel in 1970-19171. Together with earlier Mirage IIICJ, the Mirage 5J thus became the backbone of the IDF/AF's interceptor force for the first half of the 1970s. (Albert Grandolini Collection)

massive investment from abroad than Paris was able to provide.

This deficiency became crystal clear when France imposed its two arms embargos, in 1967 and 1968: even then, it was quickly overcome through diplomatic means. While at earlier times officially refusing to deliver arms directly to Israel – or at least looking away while the Zionist activists were acquiring these in the USA, and when Germany supplied US-made M48 MBTs – in 1963 Washington granted the first permission for deliveries of MIM-23 HAWK surface-to-air missiles to Israel. Thus began a period of on/off negotiations that was to last for nearly five years, until a combination of Zionist pressure in the USA, and skilful negotiations by Israeli representatives resulted in securing approvals for deliveries of advanced offensive armament. Between 1968 and 1973, the IDF/AF thus received 178 Douglas A-4 Skyhawk and 122 McDonnell-Douglas F-4E Phantom II fighter-bombers from the USA, and 51 Dassault Mirage 5Js from France (the latter were acquired clandestinely, despite the French arms embargo, with help of the Rockwell Corporation). This massive re-equipment enabled the air force to retire most of its older and slower French jets and vastly expanded its combat capability. Indeed, thanks to the availability of the advanced US technology, starting from 1968 the IDF began relaying upon ever more advanced and more complex weaponry to remain superior to its opponents: by 1973, it grew into what was widely considered the most efficient and competent of all the air forces in the Middle East. Maintained at a high degree of readiness, it was constantly involved in projecting Israeli military might in the region.

LEBANESE ARMED FORCES

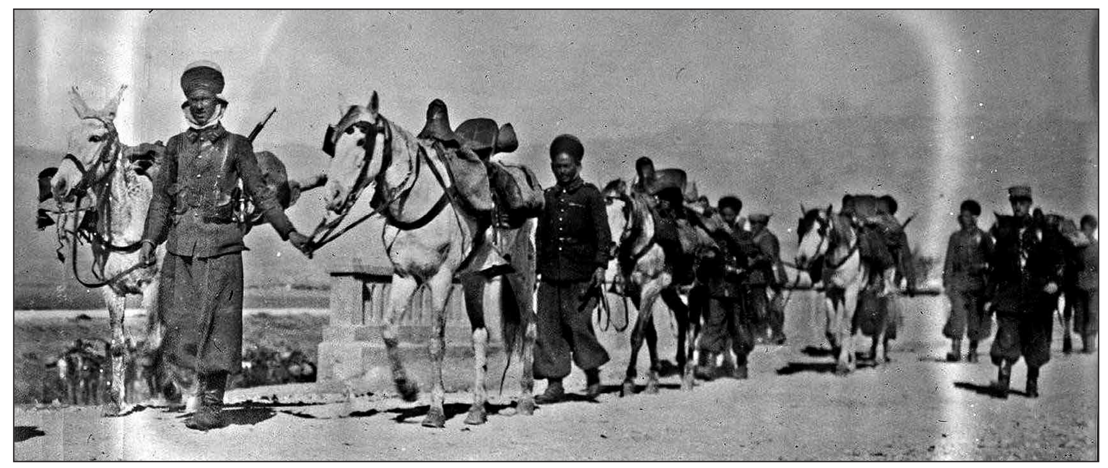
Many of the Lebanese like to point out that the local armed forces can trace their origins back to the times of Prince Fakhr ad-Din. However, except for memories, no traditions directly related to that period are left. Instead, the first modern-day native unit came into being was in 1920, when the Legion of the Orient (or 'Syrian Legion') was established by the French mandate authorities. Composed of cavalry and infantry units, it saw intensive action during the Great Arab Revolt of 1925-1927, when it was expanded through the addition of the Lebanese First Sharp Shooters Unit. During the following years, the Legion was re-organised as the Special Troops of the Levant (*Troupes Speciales du Levant*). Through addition of the elements of the French Foreign Legion, *tirailleurs* (infantry) and *spahis* (cavalry) drafted from French possessions in North Africa, and artillery units from metropolitan France, Algeria and Senegal, this gradually grew into the 10,000-strong Army of the Levant. For the purpose of domestic security in specific regions – foremost Lebanon, Aleppo and Damascus – the French established a gendarmerie-like auxiliary force (*Troupes Supplementaires*) with nine companies of Lebanese Light Infantry (*Chasseurs Libanais*) and 22 squadrons of mounted infantry troops. In 1933, the French established the Military Academy of Homs to train officers and NCOs for these services, and further intensified the drafting of officers from diverse minorities. Contemporary military commander in Syria, General Charles Huntziger, explained this in typical style of the times:

> … we must not forget that the Alawis and the Druze are the only warlike races in our mandate and make first-rate soldiers among whom we recruit our best *Troupes Speciales*.[3]

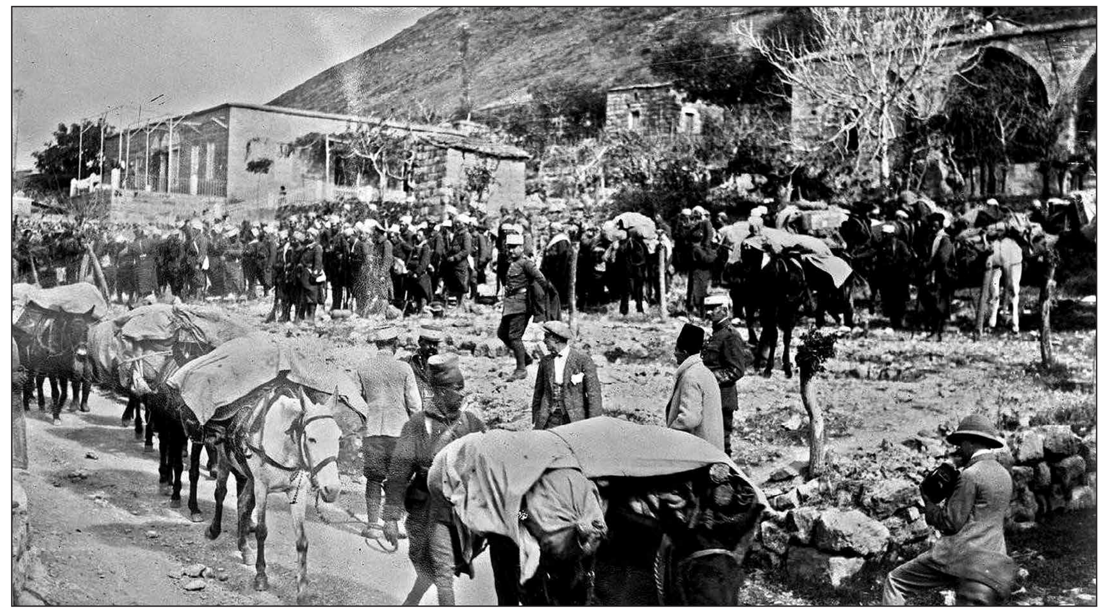
By 1938, out of 306 officers assigned to that force, only 88 were French nationals. Upon the fall of France, in June 1940, the Army of the Levant sided with the Vichy Government of Marshal Philippe Pétain, just as had the regular French Army units deployed in Syria and Lebanon (a total of seven battalions of the Foreign Legion and Colonial Infantry). All were reinforced through additional recruitment and in 1941 the *Troupes Speciales* totalled three Lebanese Light Infantry Battalions and eight Syrian Battalions, two artillery groups and miscellaneous supporting units. The Vichy forces put up a vigorous defence to the British invasion launched in June 1941 in order to prevent Syria and Lebanon from being used by Nazi Germany. However, as the troops of Commonwealth troops approached Beirut, on 10 July, the French asked for conditions, and a cease-fire was agreed for two days later.[4]

Immediately afterwards, the British disbanded most of the existing French units and repatriated their troops. Nevertheless, they did accept volunteers from the *Troupes Speciales*: enlisted into the Free French forces, these took part in fighting in North Africa, Italy, and southern France, in the 1942-1944 period. Meanwhile, the *Troupes Speciales* in Lebanon remained under the Franco-British joint command until 1 August 1945, when they were finally placed under full authority of the Lebanese government. Ever since, this day is commemorated as the Lebanese Army Day.

Due to negative experiences from the Palestine War of 1948, fearing a coup led by Muslim officers, the government intentionally kept the armed forces small and poorly armed, while acquiring heavy armament only in small batches and from diverse sources.



Spahis – colonial cavalry – of the *Troupes Speciales du Levant* – on a march through the Beka'a Valley, in 1925. (via Tom Cooper)



For all of the 1920s, and well into the 1940s, the Algerian Mountain Artillery served as the fire-support element of the *Troupes Speciales*. This photograph shows its troops in 1925. (via Tom Cooper)



An AMX-13 light tank (of French origin) of the Lebanese Army. Notable is the dark green overall colour of this vehicle: many other Lebanese AMX-13s were painted in sand overall (see colour section for details). (Pit Weinert Collection)

By the early 1970s, the Ground Forces thus still totalled only 14,000 officers and other ranks, organized into 2 armoured battalions, 10 infantry battalions (one motorized), one field artillery battalion, and one anti-aircraft battalion. Its heaviest vehicles included a miscellany of about 40 Charioteer and Sherman Firefly tanks, 25 AMX-13 and 18 M41 Walker Bulldog light tanks, 15 M42 Duster self-propelled anti-aircraft guns, 100 French-made AML-90 armoured cars and also British-made Saladin, Ferret and US-made M17 Staghound armoured cars, 16 US-made M59 and 80 M113 armoured personnel carriers, and a mix of Chaimite, AMX-VCI, AMX-13 VTT and FV.603 Saracen APCs. The ground forces also operated two types of French-made anti-tank guided missiles (ATGMs): ENTAC and SS.11.[5]

LEBANESE AIR FORCE[6]

The Lebanese Air Force (Force Aérienne Libanaise, FAL) was established on 1 June 1949 under the command of Lieutenant-Colonel Emile Boustany (then Deputy Chief-of-Staff and Director of Administration of the Lebanese Armed Forces, later Commander-in-Chief of the Lebanese Armed Forces). Its first equipment consisted of two Percival Proctors (for registrations of the aircraft in question see Table 3), and four Percival Prentices. Further aircraft acquired around the same time included one Macchi MB.308, one de Havilland DH.104 Dove (which remained in service for more than 40 years), and four Savoia-Marchetti SM.79L bombers used as transports. All of these were based at Rayak Air Base (AB), constructed by the Ottomans during the First World War and then expanded by the French in the 1930s. The initial cadre of FAL pilots was trained at the small Estabel airfield, in Lebanon, starting in 1947, by two German

instructors – Alwin Maier (or Meier, or Mayer) and Fritz Strehle.[7] Next to nothing is known about what happened with the Lebanese air force over the next two years. It was only after the armistice with Israel that Strehle – together with four British and four Italian instructors – prepared the first four Lebanese cadets (René Abdally, Michael Nawfal, Izaat Harririr and Jean Ayoub) for their final exams, completed at RAF Akrotiri on Cyprus. Despite obvious lack of flying personnel, Boustany meanwhile continued developing plans for expansion of the FAL and acquired a total of 11 de Havilland Canada Chipmunk T.Mk 20 and T.Mk 30 trainers. In January 1952, Great Britain donated six North American T-6 Harvards and provided an advisory team including five officers qualified as flight instructors, and five NCOs that served as ground instructors. During training courses provided by the British, the FAL lost one of its first four pilots, Jean Ayoub, and his co-pilot Private Geroge Kouzhaya, when their T-6 crashed, on 16 July 1952. Nevertheless, the second class of pilots graduated on 27 October.

During the same year, Beirut was granted permission to place an order for a total of four de Havilland Vampire T.Mk 55 two-seat conversion trainers, four Vampire FB.Mk 5, two FB.Mk 52s and three FB.Mk 9 single-seat jet fighters. Although all the Vampires – minus one that crashed during conversion training in the UK, killing Lieutenant Georges Rahal – were delivered to Rayak AB by 1954, the air force frequently experienced shortages of spares and fuel, which had a negative impact upon training of its flying- and ground personnel. On 23 April of the same year, the newly-constructed Khalde AB (also



A rear view of a Charioteer tank of the Lebanese Army (with its turret turned backwards), as seen in the 1980s. (UN photo)


FAL Vampire FB.Mk 52s with the serial numbers L157 (foreground) and L185 seen before delivery in 1954. (Albert Grandolini Collection)


This Hunting Percival Prentice T.Mk 1 was one of four acquired by Lebanon in 1949, and also one of the first six aircraft to ever wear Lebanese markings. (Albert Grandolini Collection)



L160 was the first of four Vampire T.Mk 55 two-seat conversion trainers acquired by Lebanon during the 1950s. (Albert Grandolini Collection)



One of four SM.79s operated by the FAL, as seen during a visit to Habbaniyah AB, in Iraq, in 1957. On 19 November 1959, this aircraft inadvertently flew into Israeli airspace where it was forced to land. It was released and returned to Lebanon, two weeks later. (Albert Grandolini Collection)

'Kleiate') was officially opened, which became the home base for fast jets. The FAL subsequently established good cooperation with the Royal Iraqi Air Force, which on 14 and 15 September 1957 donated six additional T-6 Harvards to Lebanon. By February 1958, the FAL was organised as listed in Table 3.[8]

Table 3: FAL Order of Battle, February 1958	
Base	Unit & Notes
Khalde	Fighter Squadron; equipped with 6 Vampire FB.Mk 5/52s of which 5 were operational
Rayak	Transport/Bomber Squadron; equipped with 4 SM.79s, all operational
Rayak	Communication Squadron; equipped with 1 Dove, 1 Macchi 308, and 2 Prentices, all operational
Rayak	Training Squadron; equipped with 4 Vampire T.Mk 55s, 3 Chipmunks and 13 T-6 Harvards.

HUNTERS FOR LEBANON

Colonel Boustany retained command of the FAL until 1 June 1959, when he was appointed as the Commander of the Northern Region of the Lebanese military. During the last few months of his tenure, he played a crucial role in negotiating the acquisition of Hawker Hunter fighters from the UK, as well as Aérospatiale SA.316B Alouette III helicopters from France.

Negotiations for the acquisition of Hunters were launched in 1956, but developed at a slow pace until early March 1958, when – in reaction to developments in Iraq and Jordan – the USA became involved. Apparently in response to an inquiry from Lebanon, the then USAF Attaché to Beirut recommended the FAL purchase Folland Gnats instead, since he considered them more suitable for local requirements than Hunters.[9] The British agreed with this assessment, concluding that the Gnat would not only be easier to operate and maintain than the Hunter, but also cheaper to buy. However, subsequent developments in Lebanon prompted London to forget about such reservations and – with the help of financing provided by the US Offshore Procurement – in January 1959 provide six ex-RAF Hunter F.Mk 6s to Beirut. Like the Iraqis before them, the future Lebanese pilots underwent their conversion courses at RAF Chivenor in the UK. This acquisition was followed by the purchase of four Aerospatiale SA.318 Alouette II helicopters in 1960, and then four of the more capable SE.316B Alouette IIIs, a year later. The availability of Hunters and the Alouettes' prompted a re-organisation of the FAL. Hunters entered service with the newly established No. 2 Squadron (temporarily based at Beirut IAP until Rayak was expanded), while the helicopters enabled the formation



One of the first six Hunter F.Mk 6s acquired by Lebanon in 1959. Notable is the unusual position of the fin flash – characteristic for the first batch of Lebanese Hunters. (Albert Grandolini Collection)

of No. 3 Squadron. Moreover, during the 1960s the FAL acquired 10 additional Alouette IIIs.

Following the Cairo Summit of 1964, Beirut acquired three two-seat Hunter T.Mk 66Cs (manufactured through the conversion of ex-Belgian Air Force F.Mk 6 airframes) and four single-seaters upgraded to the FGA.Mk 9 standard and officially designated F.Mk 70 (all the aircraft from the first batch were subsequently brought to the same standard). The delivery of these seven aircraft was completed by September 1966, when the company-owned Hunter T.Mk 66A saw a 12-month, temporary secondment to the FAL. Ultimately, the FAL thus acquired 19 Hunters, 10 of which were sold to Jordan in 1969.[10]

Although much appreciated by their pilots and ground personnel, they saw only very limited action during the June 1967 War: for most of that conflict, they flew combat air patrols (CAPs) along the armistice line with Israel. During the afternoon of 5 June, they did become involved in attempts to intercept Israeli aircraft that were violating Lebanese air space while returning from air strikes on Syria: this is how it came that the FAL subsequently reported that four of its Hunters, 'ambushed four Israeli (Dassault) Mystére jets', downing one near the town of Nabatiye (17km/10.5 miles inside Lebanon). In revenge, later during the afternoon the Israelis vectored two of their interceptors into Lebanese skies, and claimed one of the FAL's Hunters as shot down.[11]

FRENCH CONNECTION

After Beirut complained to the Arab League that it could not afford buying more advanced aircraft without financial support from other Arab states, sufficient funding was provided for Lebanon to place an order for 10 Dassault Mirage IIIEL interceptors, two Mirage IIIBL two-seat conversion trainers, and 5 Fouga CM.170 Magister training jets in France on 24 January 1966. The FAL personnel – including 3 pilots and 75 technicians – underwent related conversion training at Mont-de-Marsan and Cazaux ABs in France beginning in April 1967 and delivered to the Khalde-based and newly-established No. 4 Squadron between 18 April and March 1969. Due to financial constraints, the Mirage IIIELs had to serve without ground-mapping and Doppler radars, radar warning receivers and TACAN navigation systems originally requested by Beirut. Nevertheless, they were delivered together with 24 JL.100 combined fuel tanks and rocket launchers, and 50 Matra R.530 air-to-air missiles (40 infra-red and 10 radar-homing examples).[12]

After the June 1967 War, the Lebanese were granted further funding from the Arab League and contracted the French companies Thomson-CSF and Matra for the delivery of R.440 Crotale surface-to-air missiles (SAMs) and a mobile, all-weather air defence system. Moreover, they placed an order for 12 additional Mirage IIIELs with the intention of establishing a second fighter squadron. At the time, the development of the Crotale – launched only in 1964 in response to a South African request, and run in cooperation with Rockwell International of the USA, which subsequently became deeply involved in Israel – was still incomplete. Furthermore, Major-general Boustany single-handedly ran both projects and ordered full payment well in advance of delivery – although the related contract stipulated only a 25% up-front payment and the balance on delivery. Finally, Boustany reportedly paid GBP £900,000 for every Crotale site, although their actual price was GBP £500,000. Unsurprisingly, this resulted in accusations of him doing so for his own benefit, i.e. suspicions that the French then paid him a very large commission in return. The result of this affair was the cancellation of both orders: the FAL never received any Crotales or additional Mirages.[13]

Nevertheless, the early service of the Mirage IIIEL with the FAL proved quite successful. No. 4 Squadron was declared operational sometime in 1969, and maintained a fairly good operational status. A Dassault inspection team visiting the unit a year later concluded that most of its aircraft were still in excellent condition, and well maintained. Reportedly, the Lebanese Mirages saw their first combat during the seven-month war with the Palestinians in southern Lebanon of 1969, when – together with Hunters – they may have flown close air support (CAS) sorties. However, related reports remain unconfirmed to this day. The Lebanese proved highly satisfied with the the Thomson CSF Palmier advanced early warning radar acquired from France to support their Mirages, as recalled by Jean Constantine, one of the FAL officers working at the site on which this was positioned, high atop Jebel Barouk:

> I was born in 1949 and joined the military when I was 18 years old. After completing my education at the Academy in Lebanon, I served at Rayak AB for three months. Officers with top grades were usually sent to France for specialisation and thus I was trained as a radar specialist and underwent a one-year-long course in electronics… In the late 1960s, France offered one of its best and most modern radar systems to Lebanon. This was to support an integrated air defence system including Mirages,

THE KGB'S ATTEMPT TO STEAL A LEBANESE MIRAGE

Only months after the delivery of Mirage IIIELs to Lebanon, an unusual diplomatic incident took place. Representatives of the Soviet Embassy in Beirut approached Hassan Badaoui, a former FAL officer discharged for misconduct, requesting him to establish contact with one of the Lebanese Mirage-pilots and obtain information about its radar- and avionics system. Indeed, Badaoui then contacted Lieutenant Mahmoud Matar, promising him 'lots of money' if he cooperated. However, Matar played a double game: he promptly informed his superiors, who advised him to maintain contact to Badaoui and the Soviets and obtain evidence to charge them with espionage. Thus, during one of their subsequent meetings, the Soviets seemingly suggested Matar should – while on a long-range navigation training flight – defect via Turkey to Baku in Soviet Azerbaijan. In return, Matar was promised a sum of US$3 million and that his family would be kept safe in Switzerland. As a guarantee of the seriousness of Soviet intentions, Matar received US$200,000. His flight was scheduled for 3 October 1969.

However, during the final meeting, when the Soviets met Matar to set up his flight plan, the Lebanese police broke into the apartment. An exchange of fire erupted, in which a Lebanese officer and a private, as well as Vladimir Vassileev (officially an engineer at the commercial mission of the Soviet Embassy in Beirut), and Aleksander Komiakov – a colonel of the Soviet Committee for State Security (Komitet Gosudarstvennoy Bezopasnosti, KGB) in charge of the entire operation – were wounded. Nevertheless, other Lebanese police officers managed to arrest both Soviets and Hassan Badoui.

Only a few hours later, Beirut found itself on the receiving end of vehement protests from Moscow. These reached such proportions, that the Lebanese found no other solution: still on their stretchers, Vassileev and Komiakov were brought to an Aeroflot airliner waiting for them at Beirut IAP, on 4 October 1969, and flown back to Moscow.[15]



This pre-delivery photograph shows 'L 405' – the fifth Mirage IIIEL manufactured for Lebanon. All 10 FAL Mirage IIIELs served with No. 4 Squadron based at Khalde AB. Notably, their serials were repeated – RAF-style – on lower wing surfaces: in European digits under the left, and Arabic digits under the right wing. (Albert Grandolini Collection)



A scene from Beirut International Airport, on 4 October 1969, when the injured Soviet 'diplomats' were expulsed from the country. (Albert Grandolini Collection)



A pre-delivery photograph of the Mirage IIIBL registration L 511, one of the two-seat conversion trainers manufactured for Lebanon. (Albert Grandolini Collection)



One of five Fouga CM.170 Magisters acquired by the FAL in 1966. While used for jet conversion training, they could also be armed with machine-guns and unguided rockets, and deployed for ground attack. (Albert Grandolini Collection)

Crotale SAMs and other elements. That's how the FAL began the construction of the radar site at Jebel Barouk. Together with other operators, I underwent a three-month course in assembly of the radar, maintenance and repairs, and then we returned to Lebanon to help install it. The Palmier radar was connected via cable to a major computer station, positioned downhill: it was the first digital computer in the entire Middle East… [14]

ASSAD'S ASCENT TO POWER

If factionalism and sectarianism dominated the political scene and the military build-up in Lebanon, this was even more the case with Syria. Presided over by Shukri al-Quwwatli, the first government of the independent Syrian Arab Republic was democratically elected, but eagerly joined Transjordan, Lebanon and Iraq in their attack on the nascent Israel in May 1948 – if for no other reason than because most of the arable land in the British Mandate of Palestine belonged to the elites of Damascus. Quwwatli was toppled in a bloodless military coup led by the Chief-of-Staff of the Syrian Arab Army, Major-General Husni az-Za'im (an Ottoman-educated officer) supported by the Central Intelligence Agency of the USA (CIA). However, Za'im's policies of emancipating women and raising taxes, his decisions to sign a cease-fire with Israel and permanently settle 300,000 Palestinian refugees in Syria, and his contract for US companies to construct the Trans-Arabian Pipeline via Syria, enraged nearly everybody. On 15 August 1949, he was toppled in a military coup led by Generals Sami al-Hinnawi and Adib ash-Shishakli (two French-trained officers) and supported by the Syrian Socialist Nationalist Party (SSNP) – a highly-organised, secular party with an ideology of propagating the establishment of a Syrian nation-state spanning all of Syria, Lebanon, Iraq, Kuwait, Jordan, Palestine/Israel, even Cyprus and Sinai, based in Lebanon and a thorn in the side of the Maronite Christians. An entire series of coups and counter-coups followed until Syria joined the UAR in 1958, actually leaving the politicians and the armed forces no opportunity to countermand any of Za'im's reforms.

Following the break-up of the UAR (through another military coup), in 1961, the affairs in Damascus of the mid-1960s were dominated by three military officers and top members of the Ba'ath Party, all of whom were Alawites: Salah Jadid, Muhammad Umran, and Hafez al-Assad. All three became involved in the first Ba'ath-run coup attempt, in 1962: this failed and Assad was forced to flee to Lebanon, only to find himself arrested, repatriated to Syria and jailed for a few months. No sooner was he out of prison when he helped plan the next coup: it was in the course of this phase that he exploited his appointment as commander of the Dmeyr AB to set up a paramilitary force for his own protection, and began converting the Air Force Intelligence into an internal security service. Unsurprisingly, with Ba'ath firmly in control during the next coup, in 1963, Assad was put in charge of 'ending factionalism'



Hafez al-Assad in the uniform of a lieutenant-general of the SyAAF, in 1966 or 1967. (via Tom Cooper)

in the Syrian armed forces – and making them the monopoly of the party. However, while developing Dmeyr AB into his private stronghold, he began appointing a number of confidants to sensitive positions. In this fashion, he established an efficient intelligence network. As a reward for his 'distinguished' work and loyalty, in 1964 Jadid appointed him the Commander of the SyAAF.

Later the same year, Jadid and Umran clashed over the former's insistence on a single-party dictatorship and close cooperation with the USSR: Jadid won. After firming his grip to power, in 1966 he appointed Assad as Minister of Defence. Although Assad saved Jadid during another CIA-supported counter-coup, later the same year, the defeat during the June 1967 War caused a lasting rift between the two: they blamed each other for the catastrophe and differed strongly on political issues. Jadid remained in control, but Assad was only waiting for his opportunity. This emerged following the failure of the adventure in Jordan: in November 1970, Hafez al-Assad ousted his opponents and made himself undisputed ruler of Syria.[16]

From Assad's point of view, his initial position was not the least simple. Within the Alawite community, his clan was in a permanent clinch with multiple rival clans. As a military officer of Alawite background, he was an outgrowth of the French theses about 'racial' and 'warlike superiority' over a population the vast majority of which (over 70%) were Sunni Arabs. The Ba'ath Party, of which he was a member since the late 1950s, provided a useful tool for keeping all the possible competitors in check: it enabled Assad to brutally repress any kind of political (and religious) opposition with accusations of 'sectarianism' and 'regionalism', while demanding 'Arab socialism' and 'unity'. By faming such recollections as those about Sultan Baibars and the Battle of Maysaloon, the Ba'ath also helped Assad counter his sole serious competition: the SSNP. The result was bordering on absurdity: while Moscow was eager to support him, Assad was a staunch anti-Communist; nevertheless, Israel was happy to convince the USA to damn Syria as a 'Soviet puppet', or complain about Assad's supposed designs for 'Greater Syria'. On the other hand, the 'socialism' imposed by Assad and his version of the Ba'ath was actually little other than rule by oppression and patronage networks: regardless of ethno-religious background, anybody proving loyal or useful to Assad and his supporters enjoyed privileges such as well-paid jobs, apartments and cars – while dozens of thousands of those opposing him were systematically disappearing in jails.[17]

SYRIAN ARMED FORCES

As early as of 1943, leading Arab nationalists of Syria began developing plans for establishing an army including three divisions that would be deployed in support of Allied forces in Europe. Of course, the French authorities took great care to prevent such plans from realisation: on independence, Damascus thus inherited the control over about 8,000 officers and other ranks of the *Troupes Speciales* instead. Already at that point in time, Alawites dominated the nascent armed forces. As described above, during their rule in Syria of 1920-1946, the French encouraged other Syrian minority groups to enter military service as part of a strategy to gain control over the more rebellious Sunni majority. Indeed, while the Sunnis generally either tried to avoid enlistment or were outright banned from the French-controlled military, Alawites used the opportunity as a means to improve their status. Through this avenue, and in combination with the emergence of the original Ba'ath Party in the 1948-1958 period, the Alawites replaced older Sunni officers. Indeed, by the mid-1960s, they had completely excluded the traditional Sunni leadership from top positions in the military hierarchy, and thus from the mainstream of Syrian politics.[18]

The second influence crucial for the subsequent development of the Syrian armed forces was the involvement of numerous highly-experienced German advisors, nearly all of whom had served in the *Abwehr*, *Gestapo*, *Schützstaffel* (SS) and *Waffen-SS*, and the *Wehrmacht* during the Second World War. While a British military mission was deployed in the country and some officers sent for further training in Egypt in the 1946-1948 period, subsequently it was the Germans that assumed top advisory positions. Officially acting as 'top advisor for forestry and agriculture', Hyazinth Graf Strachwitz von Groß-Zauche und Camminetz – former commander of the *1. Panzer-Division* of the *Wehrmacht* – played an active, even if little-recognized role in the coup that brought Major-General Za'im to power. Hermann Julius Walther Rauff – former *Standartenführer* of the SS, and one of the top executioners of the Holocaust (and the *Porajmos* on the Roma) in German-occupied parts of the USSR, in 1941-1942 – was appointed as Commissioner of Security, with the task of reorganising the country's intelligence services. Although most of the German advisors left the country by the mid-1950s, their work on establishing the fundaments of the military security services of Syria was to have far-reaching consequences – in a practical and ideological sense.[19]

German advisors were crucial for the Syrian Arab Army being organised into two brigades – each consisting of two infantry- and one armoured battalion, and equipped with tanks and artillery left behind by the French – by 1948. Both units saw deployment during the war against Israel, but quickly proved to be lacking the leadership and training necessary for a high-intensity conflict. Following fruitless attempts to source additional arms from Great Britain, West Germany and Italy in the early 1950s, Damascus then followed Cairo in establishing links with Prague. However, the ground equipment it ordered in 1955 almost exclusively consisted of German-made tanks (and their derivatives) left over from the Second World War. These included 45 Panzerkampfwagen IVJ tanks, 32 Sturmgeschütz III Ausführung Gs (StuGIII AusfG) self-propelled assault guns and a handful of Jagdpanzer IVs, artillery pieces like 10.5cm leFH 18/40, and large stocks of Sturmgewehr 44 with associated ammunition. Subsequently, Czechoslovakia became the major source of such Soviet-made tanks as the T-34/85 and T-54, and BTR-152 APCs:

indeed, during the period of re-establishment of the Syrian armed forces following the dissolution of the UAR, in 1961-1967, and until 1972, Czechoslovak – not Soviet, as usually claimed – military advisors played a crucial role in organising, training, and advising the Syrians.[20] By 1967, the SyAA was expanded into a force generally summarized by Western sources as consisting of 12 infantry-, 2 armoured-, and 2 mechanized brigades, predominantly equipped with Soviet arms.[21] Native sources reveal not only an entirely different order of battle, but also the existence of a much higher number of brigade-sized units.[22]



One of the PzKpfw IVJs of the Syrian Arab Army (most were assigned to reservist units consisting of the Druze and Sunnis expulsed from northern Palestine at earlier times), as found abandoned by the Israelis during the June 1967 War. (Pit Weinert Collection)

The majority of Western publications about the Syrian armed forces stress that the professionalism and cohesion of the Syrian armed forces in the 1960s were destroyed by widespread factionalism, successive coups and officers that spent most of their time with meddling in politics, rather than training their troops. Related Czechoslovak reports partially confirm this, but also describe high levels of professionalism amongst officers that did not become involved in politics. Moreover, there is no doubt that the Syrians proved to be ferocious combatants, usually fighting in complete disregard for their own safety: while carefully avoiding any kind of praise for their combat effectiveness during the June 1967 War, and emphasising their predilection to shell civilian targets – the Israeli sources grudgingly admit the heavy losses the IDF suffered while assaulting the well-fortified Golan Heights during the June 1967 War.[23]

Immediately afterwards, Assad went to great extents to rebuild and reform the armed forces, but also to appoint officers loyal to him into as many crucial positions as possible. By 1970, Damascus acquired 700 T-54/55 MBTs, 800 artillery pieces and 100 assault guns (SU-100s), and 600 BTR-152 APCs – most of these from, or at least via, Prague. This equipment was used to expand the SyAA to about 100,000 men, organized into one armoured, two mechanised, and two infantry divisions, while Assad's 'praetorian guard' – the Defence Companies commanded by his brother Rifa'at – was expanded into a brigade-sized armoured formation.[24]

Assuming the character of Rifa'at's private army, the Defence Companies subsequently became the first to receive any new major weapons system. By 1972, they were expanded and consisted of one armoured- and one mountain brigade: the former was protecting Damascus, while the later was protecting the Qardaha area near Lattakia, the hometown of the Assad clan. By 1971, another unit of this type came into being: the former brigade-sized Presidential Guard was re-organized as the 1,000-strong Republican Guards, composed entirely of Alawite troops, and commanded by officers from the Air Force Intelligence. Its task became the personal protection of the President, his palace and offices, and visiting dignitaries. Finally, as a counterweight to the Defence Companies, in 1972 the formation designated as Special Forces was established under the command of Major-General Ali Haydar. An Alawite from the town of Jableh, Haydar was a graduate of both the Military Academy in Homs and the Army Staff College. At odds with Rifa'at since late 1960s, he was widely respected for his honesty and military skill – so also by Hafez. Haydar was to supervise a rapidly growing number of commando-type units established over the following years.[25]

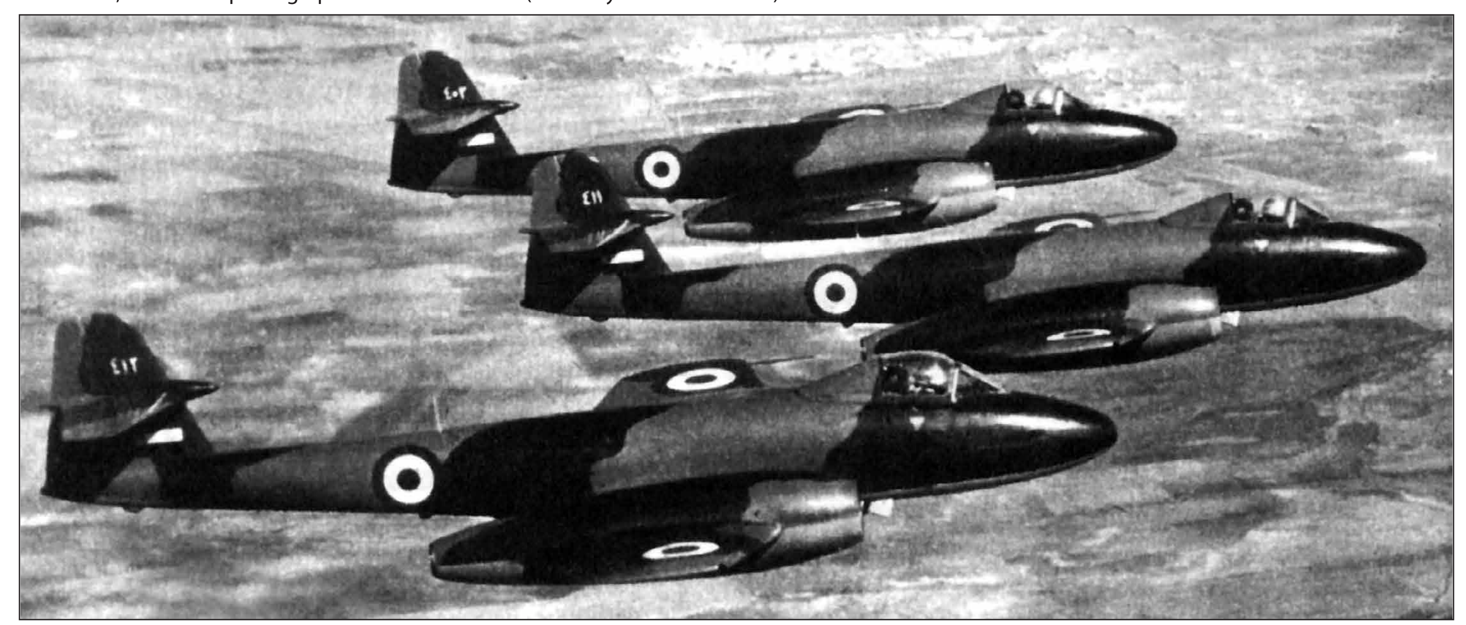
SYRIAN ARAB AIR FORCE[26]

The SyAAF was officially established on 16 October 1946. Its first commander, Colonel Abdel Wahhad al-Hakim was an army officer, but took his duties very seriously. He proved able to quickly obtain six Piper J-3C-65 Cubs directly from the Piper Company in the USA and four Percival Proctor Mk Vs from private dealers. Training of the first pilots proved a more troublesome affair and thus four de Havilland DH.82A Tiger Moths were acquired from private sources in Great Britain by the end of the same year. Following the Lebanese example, in 1947, Hakim contracted five Croatian pilots found by Syrian representatives in one of many camps for displaced persons in Italy. Led by Mato Dukovac (the leading Croatian ace of the Second World War) these trained the first group of 30 Syrian pilots on Tiger Moths. During the Palestine War of 1948-1949, Dukovac and his students were rushed to Estabel airfield in Lebanon, from where they flew operational sorties on 20 North American T-6 Texans meanwhile bought from the USA – sometimes in cooperation with Avro Anson light transports of the Royal Iraqi Air Force, forward-deployed at Damascus Almazza airport during the conflict.[27]

Successive governments ran a major expansion of the SyAAF during the following years. In 1950, Damascus acquired 26 Fiat G.55 and 4 Fiat G.59B-2 fighters from Italy, followed by 9 Fiat G.46-1 two-seat conversion trainers, and signed a contract with London providing for training of pilots and ground personnel in Great Britain, along with the purchase of Chipmunk basic trainers, 10 reconditioned Supermarine Spitfire F.Mk 22 fighters, 12 Gloster Meteor F.Mk 8 jet fighters and two Meteor T.Mk 7 conversion trainers. Two groups of Syrian pilots and technicians underwent conversion training at the Royal Air Force (RAF) Technical Academy in Henlow, in 1951.



A batch of 20 T-6 Texans bought from the USA represented the first combat aircraft of the Syrian Air Force. This example was last used as an advanced trainer (as obvious by the yellow fuselage band and the big black serial number 44) before being retired and displayed at the former Military Museum in Damascus, where this photograph was taken in 1974. (Photo by Dr David Nicolle)



A trio of SyAAF Gloster Meteors, as seen shortly before their delivery. The type was the only jet fighter in service until the acquisition of the first MiG-17Fs in 1957. During the Suez War of 1956, two pairs of Meteors successfully intercepted and shot down an English Electric Canberra reconnaissance bomber underway over Syria. (Tom Cooper Collection)

While the Chipmunks and Spitfires were delivered, British authorities embargoed the delivery of Meteors. The blockade was lifted in 1952, and Damascus promptly rushed to repeat the order for these, and then buy additional ones: by 1953, a total of 18 Meteors were in Syria, and a small team of British officers – subsequently replaced by the Egyptians – helped the SyAAF make them operational. A year later, the Air Force College was established at the military side of Nayrab airport: its first class included 15 pilots (amongst them a graduate of the Homs Military Academy named Hafez al-Assad). Meanwhile, air bases at Hama and Almazza were expanded to enable jet operations. Related work on these and other facilities was incomplete by the time Syria placed an order for a total of 41 MiG-15bis' and 4 MiG-15UTIs in Czechoslovakia, in 1955. These were delivered to Abu Suweir AB, in Egypt, while their future pilots and ground personnel were to undergo conversion training at Fayid AB. This plan was spoiled by the Suez War of 1956: while 22 Syrian aircraft were destroyed on the ground and 3 MiG-15UTIs evacuated to Syria via Saudi Arabia, the second batch of 20 MiG-15bis survived still packed in their transport containers. These were subsequently donated to Egypt, while Damascus placed an order for 60 MiG-17Fs, 20 radar-equipped MiG-17PFs, and 12 Ilyushin Il-28 bombers in Moscow instead. Delivery of these aircraft had barely begun when Syria joined the UAR and the SyAAF was amalgamated into the resulting United Arab Republic Air Force (UARAF) in 1958. The Egyptians took away nearly all of the SyAAF's combat aircraft, and all the training equipment, stationing only two MiG-17F-equipped squadrons in what became the 'Eastern Province'.[28]

The SyAAF was re-established with extensive Czechoslovak



A row of MiG-17PFs: originally ordered by Syria in 1957, these were all taken-up by the UARAF when the country joined Egypt, a year later. The unit operating them – No. 31 'CrowBat' Squadron – was staffed by mixed crews of Egyptian and Syrian origin, and always commanded by an officer of Syrian background, but stationed in Egypt, where this photograph was taken in 1958. (Nour Bardai Collection)

support following the anti-Egyptian coup of 1961. To bolster about 40 MiG-17Fs and four Il-28Rs left behind by the UARAF, in 1963 it placed an order for 48 supersonic MiG-21F-13s in the USSR. By 1967, Damascus had also received the first batch of radar-equipped MiG-21PFMs. This was the complement with which the SyAAF fought the June 1967 War. With Assad preoccupied with the power struggle against Atassi and Jadid, he left his deputy, British- and French-trained Major-General Mohammad Assad Moukiiad, to run the SyAAF. On 5 June 1967, Moukiiad proved clever enough to quickly evacuate most combat aircraft to air bases in northern Syria and thus outside the Israeli reach. The SyAAF thus lost around 20 aircraft on the ground and in air combats with the IDF/AF, but in turn evaded the fate of the UARAF, while achieving several aerial victories against marauding Israeli fighter-bombers.

In the period 1967-1970, the SyAAF was significantly expanded through acquisitions of 50 MiG-17Fs, 62 MiG-21PFM/R/Ms, 12 Sukhoi Su-7BMKs, and 22 Mil Mi-8 helicopters, and through cooperation with Czechoslovakia and Pakistan. However, due to an anti-Communist stance, and continuous differences with Atassi, Assad was extremely reluctant to accept advice from Moscow. Instead, he sought it in Prague. Much to the regret of the Syrians, the Czechoslovak arms industry could only deliver 77 Aero L-29 Delfin jet trainers, and no combat aircraft. Still, this equipment enabled Assad and Moukiiad to reorganise the air force into six air brigades with three squadrons each. Existing air bases were hardened through the construction of extensive underground facilities and hundreds of hardened aircraft shelters, and nearly a dozen new airfields emerged: amongst these was the new air base for the Air Force Academy, constructed by Polish experts at Kweres, east of Aleppo.[29]

CHAPTER 4
DISINTEGRATION OF LEBANON

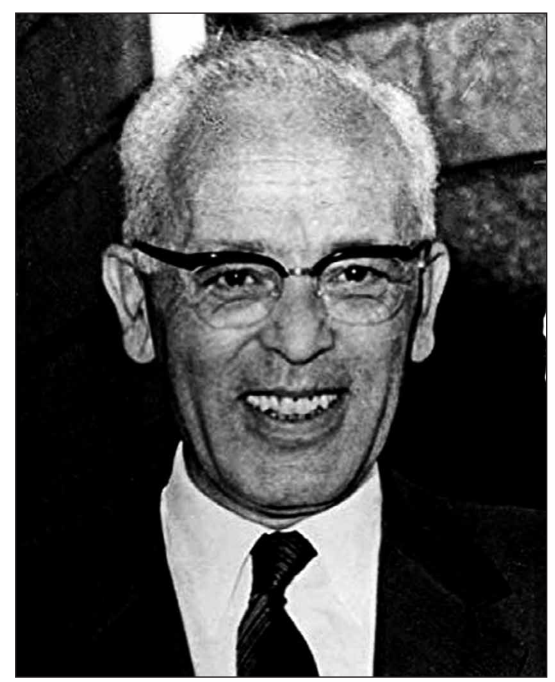
As a wave of dozens of thousands of Palestinian refugees and diverse factions of the PLO moved from Jordan to Lebanon in 1970 and 1971, very few of those involved and of those monitoring this development could imagine the consequences. Even more so, while nowadays superimposed over everything else, at the time the issue of religion as a potential motivator was ignored not only in Israel and the West, but even by the rank and file of the Palestinian nationalists. What did matter instead, especially in the USA, was that major Palestinian factions – like Fatah and the PFLP – were widely perceived as 'leftist' and thus 'Soviet allies'. Unsurprisingly, they were expected to join similar Lebanese Muslim forces 'in their efforts to decrease the influence and power of the Christians and of the Lebanese state', indeed: to take over the country and then ally themselves with Moscow. And still, except for the Lebanese government, neither Israel nor any of the Western powers did anything to address this issue – not to talk about the very root of the problem – although the sheer numbers and the ethno-religious and political organisation of Lebanon should have made it clear that a catastrophe was in the making.

By 1971, at least 300,000, perhaps as many as 500,000 Palestinian refugees were concentrated in the country: about 100,000 settled in the 'Misery Belt' – three huge refugee camps around Beirut all essentially consisting of endless rows of sheet metal huts and board stalls – another 100,000 in the Tyre area, while up to 200,000 distributed themselves in southern Lebanon. They arrived together with between 20,000 and 50,000 fedayeen – including the hard core of the PLO and the PFLP, both of which established their HQs in Beirut: although poorly trained, the militants were meanwhile armed to a point where they were outmatching the Lebanese armed forces.[1]

Overall, the chain of events started in 1947 just continued in a never-ending cycle of escalating violence. The dust of the inevitable result – the incredibly complex Lebanese War – did not really settle until today, but several facts were obvious before long: in 1975, the country ceased to exist as a sovereign entity with an effective central government. Instead, it was carved up into numerous zones of control by countless factions.

OVERTURE

In September 1970, in what was the closest and most controversial presidential election in the history of Lebanon, the National Assembly elected Maronite Christian businessman Suleman Frangieh as the fifth president of Lebanon. While a good friend of Hafez al-Assad and his brother Rifa'at, he was also a strong supporter of Lebanese sovereignty. The moment he entered office, Frangieh sought to reassert government control over the fedayeen: the Lebanese armed forces increased their patrolling activity and reinforced their effort to curb militant raids into Israel. Still preoccupied with the Black September-related affairs in Jordan, Arafat reacted by ordering local commanders to quiet their activities in November 1970. Indeed, on 1 May 1971, Frangieh issued an order for the Army to open fire at



Suleiman Frangieh, President of Lebanon from 1970 until 1976. (Mark Lepko Collection)

any militants either firing into Israel or attempting to enter it.[2]

With hindsight, the conclusion to hand is that the Lebanese President stood no chance. Despite his countermeasures, after moving to Lebanon, Arafat quickly consolidated his power. Applying militarisation, he gained control over the majority of refugee camps and diverse factions. Moreover, the Palestinian strongman became determined not to make a similar mistake as in Jordan: the PLO took great care to establish close ties to the Lebanese Muslims – including those organised into leftist, but also religiously-motivated militias. Perhaps the most notable example of emerging movements became the Lebanese Resistance Regiments (colloquially abbreviated into AMAL). De-facto a proxy of the Fatah, Amal was initially a small militia established in cooperation with a political party of the Shi'a Muslims: however, it was to grow into a major movement due to the subsequent chain of events.

The PLO's final move to Lebanon happened around the same time Frangieh appointed Major-General Iskander Ghanem as the new Commander-in-Chief of the armed forces. An uncompromising officer, Ghanem was determined to take an even more vigorous stand. However, even with Ghanem on his side, Frangieh was out of position to bring the situation under control – and then not only because of the Palestinians, but because of Israeli actions too. Several years earlier, a man named Sa'di entered Lebanon from Israel. All the time tracked by military intelligence, under suspicion of being an Israeli agent, he joined the fedayeen in a camp in Sarafand, 13km (8 miles) south of Sidon. On his advice, on 2 January 1971 the militants embarked five small vessels and moved south. Already the first was ambushed and its crew captured by the IDF. On the basis of intelligence acquired through interrogation, on 14 January 1971, the Israelis flew a heliborne raid against the Sarafand camp, in which around 10 fedayeen were killed.[3]



Yassir Arafat with Egyptian President Sadat. (Courtesy Aydinlik)

Of course, the raid provoked a reaction from the fedayeen, which in turn was curtailed by Frangieh's countermeasures – only causing a new escalation. On 31 December 1971, the police arrested several members of the Saiqa in Beirut. Shortly after, the police station where those arrested were held was surrounded by the fedayeen and then attacked. When reinforcements arrived, they were ambushed by the Saiqa.[4] Of apparently minor importance, and actually involving a Syrian-controlled group of Palestinian militants, this incident prompted the government to start preparing



Yassir Arafat (fourth from right), during the visit to the Brandenburger Tor (Brandenburg Gate), in East Berlin, in the German Democratic Republic (East Germany), in November 1971. With the PLO receiving much of its arms from the USSR and the Eastern Block, the Arab-Israeli conflict was widely perceived as an element of the Cold War, rather than what it actually was. (Bundesarchiv, Bild 183-K1102-032)



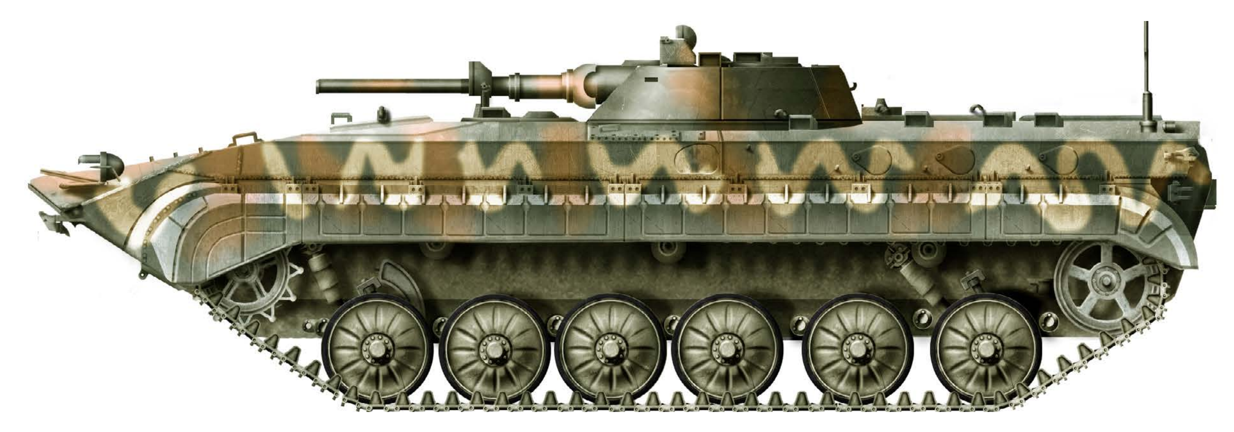
The T-54 and T-55 series of MBTs formed the backbone of the SyAA's mechanised formations from the late 1960s well into present times. The majority of vehicles have received often elaborate camouflage patterns, usually consisting of sand, brown or grey splotches applied over the dark olive green in which they were painted before delivery. Application of turret numbers (in this case: 288) was widespread, and usually related to the hull numbers, which in turn were frequently – even if not always – related to the assignment to the specific unit. (Artwork by David Bocquelet)



The majority of the SyAA's T-54/55s deployed in Lebanon starting from June 1976 belonged to the 85th Independent Brigade. Most were originally kept in dark olive green overall, but gradually received ever more elaborate camouflage patterns, usually including large splotches of sand colour. Diverse inscriptions were also applied on their turrets over time: while details on most of them remain unknown, usually they included slogans supportive of Hafez al-Assad. Inset is shown the method with which the unit insignia and the hull number was usually applied on the glacis and the rear hull: as well as the tactical insignia of the unit in question (in this case that of the 96th Brigade), the hull number included the vehicle's individual number and the word 'al-Jaysh' ('Army'). (Artwork by David Bocquelet)



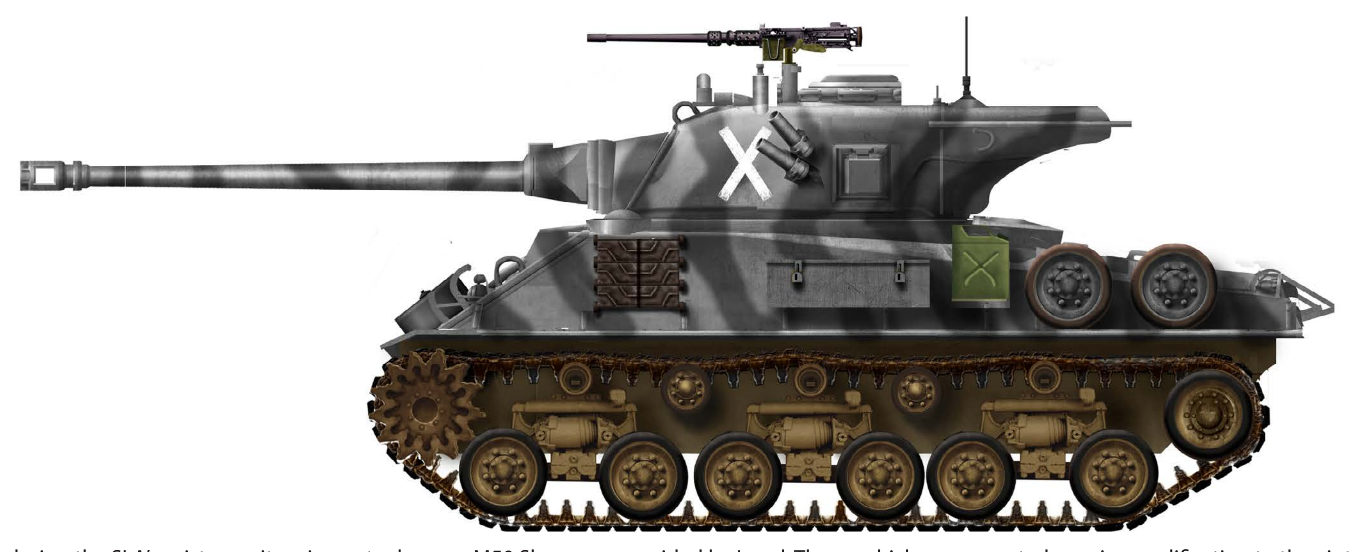
Armed with the 115mm gun, the T-62 was the most powerful fighting vehicle of the Syrian Arab Army of the 1970s, and capable of matching nearly all of the MBTs in Israeli service at the time. However, while having excellently shaped armour, its inside was cramped, and the ammunition stored directly behind the glacis tended to blow up even due to the shock of glancing hits to the glacis. T-62s of the 3rd Division wore a camouflage pattern consisting of dark olive green overall, over which big splotches of sand and brown were applied, and had their turret numbers (756 in this case) applied inside a white rectangle. Inset is shown the application of the hull number (164626) and the tactical insignia of a different example to the one shown in the main illustration. (Artwork by David Bocquelet)



The BMP-1 became the most widespread armoured vehicle of the Syrian mechanised infantry during the 1970s. Like T-54/55s and T-62s, most vehicles received big splotches of brown and sand atop of their original dark olive green colour. When applied (which was not always the case), their markings consisted of the hull number and the word 'al-Jaysh' on the lower portion of the glacis, and on the rear hull. (Artwork by David Bocquelet)



The AMX-13 was originally designed as a light tank and tank destroyer, mounting a 75mm cannon based on a German design from the Second World War, with an auto-loader, it included a turret the upper part of which (including the gun mount) was rigid and elevated together with the weapon. Later it was up-armed with a 90mm gun. Lebanon is known to have acquired about 50 of these: most were left in their original dark green overall colour, but the majority of those known to have been operated by the SLA were painted in sand overall. (Artwork by David Bocquelet)



Early during the SLA's existence, its primary tanks were M50 Shermans provided by Israel. These vehicles represented a major modification to the vintage US-made M4A4 Sherman, with an enlarged turret mounting a 75mm M-50 cannon on the front, and counterweight at the rear (to balance the weight of the longer and heavier gun). All were re-equipped with Cummins V-8 460 horsepower (340kW) diesel engines and received HVSS suspension with wider tracks. Phased out from service with the IDF in the late 1970s, most were donated to diverse factions of the Lebanese Christians, including 19 to the KRF, 20 to the Tigers Militia, 40 to the Lebanese Forces, and 35 to the SLA. The PLO captured at least two intact, and later used them in the defence of West Beirut, in the summer of 1982. As far as is known, the SLA gradually applied its own camouflage patterns on its M50s, usually consisting of two shades of grey, as shown here. (Artwork by David Bocquelet)

Palestinian fedayeen in the Beirut area, 1976-1978. The myriad of factions involved in the Lebanese Civil War acquired a wide range of equipment and uniforms from diverse sources. The militant shown here was a member of the Arab Liberation Front, the 'Iraqi branch' of the PLO. He wore a camouflage jacket made to the ERDL standard of the USA – or a copy of the same, perhaps manufactured in Romania and diverted from Jordanian stocks. As usual at the time, his attire was complemented by rather beaten jeans, the traditional Keffiyeh (Palestinian scarf, always in the version of a specific tribe), and a Chinese-made Type-56 chest rig (better known as the 'Chicom'). He is shown armed with an AKMS, a Soviet-made AKM assault rifle in 7.62x39mm and with a folding butt. (Artwork by Anderson Subtil)



An Israeli paratrooper of the late 1970s to early 1980s. At the time, the Israeli infantry was one of the best-equipped, world-wide, using equipment that would become common in other armies only many years later. Typical were the Orlite ballistic helmet, made of Kevlar (which replaced the old, US-made M1), and the camouflage netting atop of it, secured in place by rubber bands. Atop their – generally – austere IDF uniform, frequently faded by continued use, the Israeli paras usually wore the Shahpats flak vest (developed by Orlite to replace the older US-made M1952), and the EPHOD web gear, with bags for up to 12 magazines, grenades, medical equipment, two water canteens and a trench-digging tool. Usually, the troops wore no visible insignia (actually, the only item making them recognizable as paras were their brown jumping boots). The armament shown is an IMI Galil 5.56mm NATO assault rifle. The backpack frequently contained rifle grenades, very useful for house-to-house fighting in Lebanon. (Artwork by Anderson Subtil)

Although largely consisting of 'commandos' and other types of special forces, the Syrian forces deployed in Lebanon used much simpler and more conventional items than the Israelis. This commando is shown wearing the Syrian camouflage uniform featuring the 'Red Lizard' pattern (similar to that of the French Army), and a fabric cover for his Soviet-made steel helmet (also distributed to the Saiqas). The insignia on his sleeve indicates the rank of warrant officer third class. Notable is that the SyAA made use of several items of US origin, even though it is unclear if these were originals or local copies. These included M65 field caps and canvas belts, one of which is shown in this illustration with a pouch magazine from one of the Eastern Block countries. As could be expected, his firearm is the ubiquitous Kalashnikov AK-47, of 7.62x39mm calibre. (Artwork by Anderson Subtil)





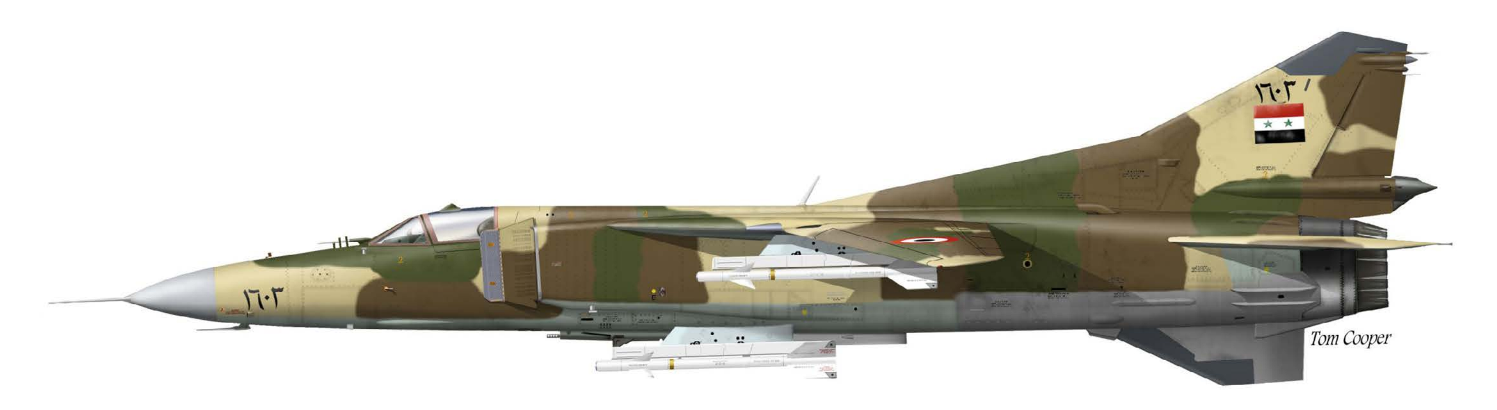
All 10 Mirage IIIELs of No. 4 Squadron FAL wore the same, standard camouflage pattern in Gris Bleu tres Fonce (dark grey) and Gris Vert Fonce (dark green on upper surfaces and sides, and either aluminium or light blue-grey on undersurfaces. Originally intended to serve as interceptors they were armed with a total of 50 Matra R.530 air-to-air missiles. However, during their reported first combat deployment, against the Palestinian fedayeen in southern Lebanon, in 1969, and during their confirmed first combat deployment, against the PLO and other Palestinian militias in May 1973, they foremost deployed Matra JL.100 launchers for unguided 68mm rockets combined with fuel tanks. (Artwork by Tom Cooper)



Although the older MiG-21F-13s still formed up to 50% of the SyAAF interceptor fleet, the main variant in service in the mid-1970s was the MiG-21M/MFs. All were usually delivered wearing diverse versions of the standardised camouflage pattern consisting of beige (BS381C/388) and olive drab (BS381C/298) on upper surfaces and sides, and light admiralty grey (BS381C/697 or FS35622) on undersurfaces – as illustrated in the inset in the upper left corner. However, examples that underwent overhauls at The Works – the SyAAF's main maintenance facility at Nayrab AB (the military side of Aleppo International) were all re-painted in colours consisting of orange sand and blue-green on top surfaces and sides, and either light admiralty grey or diverse shades of light blue on undersides. Serials were always applied in black on the forward fuselage and the upper fin, though in a wide diversity of sizes and Arabic fonts. Their armament typically consisted of four R-3S missiles. (Artwork by Tom Cooper)



In 1977, Damascus was granted permission to buy MiG-21bis interceptors and it promptly ordered at least 20, subsequently followed by more. Their camouflage pattern was still the same standard as on earlier MiG-21M/MFs, but in light stone (BS381C/361) and olive drab (BS381C/298), while undersides were still painted in light admiralty grey (BS381C/697 or FS35622). The aircraft in question arrived together with the first of the – badly overdue – new, Soviet-made air-to-air missiles, including R-60M/MKs (outboard pylon) and R-13Ms. As on earlier MiG-21-variants in Syrian service, no roundels were ever applied on their fuselages, while four-digit serials (in ranges 2200 and 2300) were always applied on the forward fuselage and near the top of the fin. (Artwork by Tom Cooper)



In April 1974, the SyAAF received its first batch of at least 16 MiG-23MS interceptors. All were camouflaged in the standardised pattern for export aircraft, consisting of beige (BS381C/388), dark brown (BS381C/411 or 450, similar to FS20095), and olive green (BS381C/298, similar to FS34098) on the upper surfaces. The forward portion of the fuselage's underside and the undersurfaces of the wing were painted in light admiralty grey (BS381C/697 or FS35622) and the rear portion in medium grey (FS26152). National markings were applied in four positions on the wing only. Known serial numbers were in the range 1601-1627, though this includes a number of examples delivered by Libya only in 1982, to replace losses from the war in Lebanon. During the first years of their service, they were compatible only with older R-3S missiles. (Artwork by Tom Cooper)



All MiG-25s manufactured and exported in the late 1970s and early 1980s were painted in medium grey overall (similar to BS381C/626 camouflage grey or FS26152), with all dielectric surfaces (radomes, antenna-covers etc.) in dark gull grey (FS26231), and the big anti-glare panel in flat black (FS270309). The lower surfaces and sides of the engine nacelles were left in 'neutral steel'. Roundels were applied in four positions on the wing only, while the serials were in black and applied underneath the cockpit and near the tip of the fin. The aircraft is shown armed with 'AA-6 Acrid' missiles, the wings and fins of which were made of titanium, giving them a dark bluish appearance: the R-40TD on the inboard pylon (and inset), and the R-40RD on the outboard. (Artwork by Tom Cooper)



MiG-25RBs delivered to Syria (B stood for 'bomber', although the SyAAF is not known to have used its RBs for that purpose ever) were painted in the same colours as MiG-25PDs. Notable is that the grey colour on top surfaces usually faded into a lighter shade, closer to light grey (FS26073), while that on the front fuselage and the forward part of the intakes tended to get darker over time, due to the heat caused by friction at high speed. Of course, instead of the big radome with the Smerch-2A radar, they had only a small one (covering the same radar as used on the MiG-21): instead, the entire fuselage forward of the cockpit was used to pack a set of reconnaissance cameras and an ELINT-gathering suite. Like all MiGs and Sukhois operated by the SyAAF since 1961, they wore no national markings on the fuselage at all. (Artwork by Tom Cooper)



The simple, small, versatile and sturdy A-4 Skyhawk was the actual backbone of the IDF/AF's fighter-bomber-fleet for most of the 1970s. The type was deployed for almost any task – from simple CAS to complex SEAD operations – except for interception, but could be armed with Shafrir Mk.II air-to-air missiles for self-defence purposes. The large number of aircraft delivered, and often complex repairs of examples damaged in combat during the October 1973 War, resulted in several similar colours applied on them. McDonnell-Douglas painted A-4s for Israel in sand (FS33531), tan (FS30219) and green (FS34258), while the IAI used local shades of the same colours instead (for example: the green was FS34227). (Artwork by Tom Cooper)



Although the fleet had been nearly halved due to combat-related- and peace-time-attrition, the Mirage IIICJ continued soldiering on with two squadrons even once it was replaced by Kfirs and F-15A/Bs. One of the reasons was the extensive experience of the Israelis in operating and maintaining the type (both of which resulted in a significant number of minor modifications introduced over time); another was that it proved cheaper to stand quick reaction alert than the more complex F-15. While most of the Mirages retained their standardised camouflage pattern in Beige (RAL1001), Beigebraun (RAL8024) and Rasengrün (RAL6011) on top surfaces and sides, and Lichtgrau (RAL7035) on undersurfaces, from the mid-1970s several received a camouflage pattern similar to that of the F-15s, in two shades of compass ghost grey (see below for details), also applied to most Kfir C.2s starting in 1978. (Artwork by Tom Cooper)



Early Kfirs were initially painted in the same colours as A-4 Skyhawks, including sand (FS33531), tan (FS30219) and green (FS34258), usually applied following the pattern used on Mirage IIICJs and Mirage 5Js at earlier times. The example illustrated here began its career as Kfir C.1 with No. 101 Squadron, before it was handed over to No. 109 Squadron and then upgraded to C.2 standard in 1977. The aircraft is shown in something like a 'standard' weapons configuration for this type in the late 1970s, including an 880-litre supersonic drop tank under the centreline and a pair of Shafrir Mk.IIs under the outboard underwing pylons. Inboard hardpoints were usually reserved for air-to-ground weaponry, in this case a US-made CBU-58, as frequently deployed by the IDF/AF in Lebanon from 1978. (Artwork by Tom Cooper)



Project Peace Jack resulted in the emergence of three F-4E(S) – serials 492, 498 and 499 – with their heavily modified, 30cm/12in longer noses made by General Dynamics: these had three big optical ports (one to either side and one looking directly down) necessary for the – still massive, even if miniaturised – HIAC-1 LOROP camera. As usual for all F-4Es delivered to Israel, they wore the standardised camouflage pattern in sand (FS33531), brown (FS30219) and green (FS34227) on top surfaces and sides, and light blue (FS35622) on undersurfaces. National insignia was applied in six positions (except for early F-4Es of No. 201 Squadron, which used to wear them only in four positions). This aircraft is illustrated wearing the insignia of its parent unit, No. 119 Squadron, and a kill marking for an Iraqi MiG-21 that reportedly crashed while pursuing it, in early 1982 (multiple Iraqi sources have denied any such losses). (Artwork by Tom Cooper)



As usual in the 1970s, the F-15A/Bs delivered to Israel wore a standardised camouflage pattern consisting of two shades of compass ghost grey: light (FS36375) was applied over most of the aircraft, while particularly exposed parts of the front and upper fuselage and wing were painted in dark (FS36320). Lower rear parts of the engine nacelles were left unpainted, and most had their 'turkey feathers' petals removed from the afterburners. Prior to 1978, their only other insignia included national markings and the patch of No. 133 Squadron high up the fin, while standard armament consisted of AIM-9H Sidewinders and AIM-7F Sparrows. Israel-made Python Mk.III missiles - initially attached on a dual rail on the underwing hardpoint, as shown here - and kill markings began to emerge in 1978, while individual names were applied starting in 1981. (Artwork by Tom Cooper)



During the 1970s, the IDF/AF acquired a sizeable fleet of Boeing 707-316 and -320 airliners. With extensive help from the USA, these were converted into at least six tankers and a similar number of aircraft for COMINT/SIGINT and ELINT-gathering purposes, all of which were operated by No. 120 'International' Squadron. While rarely photographed, this example is known to have worn a similar, yet slightly thinner array of antennas on its 'cheeks' as installed of Boeing RC-135Ws of the US Air Force. While its fuselage was painted in white, lower portions of the same and its wings were all in grey: the cheat line was in the same blue colour (FS35090) as used for the Israeli national insignia. Due to the sensitivity of their operations, the unit patch on the fin was frequently left off: if applied, that on the forward fuselage was more often in place. (Artwork by Luca Canossa)


Southern Lebanon
BEIRUT
Zahle
IAP
BEIRUT-DAMASCUS
HIGHWAY
Shtura
Khalde
Alei
Muderej
Ain Dara
Ein Zehalta
Damour
Dayr Kamr
Bayt ed-Din
Ba'aklin
Barouch
Muktara
Mediterranean Sea
LITANI
Jub Jenin
LEBANON
el-Bire
AWALI
LAKE KAROUN
Sidon
Jezzine
Masara
Sukmur
Kfar Kuq
SHAMS
Kfar Hune
Dumr e'Beqa'a
Rashia el-Wadi
ZAHRANI
Eishiah
Harat al-Hart
Nabatiyah
Hasbayya
JEBEL SHEIKH / MT. HERMON
Marjayoun
BEAUFORT CASTLE
LITANI
Khiyam
Tyre
Tayybah
Metulla
Majdal Shams
Marrakah
Rashidiyah
Mas'adah
Qiryat Shemona
Tibnin
Houla
SYRIAN ARAB REPUBLIC
Shaqra
Mays al-Jabal
Yatar
UNDOF Zone
Bint Jubayl
Aytarun
Ayta ash-Shaab
Ramon Naftali
Rosh HaNiqra
Zarit
Adamit
Shetula
Rmeich
Avivim
GOLAN HEIGHTS (occupied by Israel)
Nahariyya
Rihaniya
ISRAEL

for an all-out confrontation with the Palestinians in Lebanon. Correspondingly, during 1972, Beirut took care to re-equip its ground forces with US-made M16 and Belgian-made FN FAL assault rifles, and to acquire six additional CM.170 Magisters from West Germany. Furthermore, it placed an order for six Agusta-Bell AB.212 helicopters in Italy (these were delivered in 1973 and 1974, followed by six additional in 1979), and six Scottish Aviation Bulldog primary trainers (delivered in 1975, as a replacement for worn-out Chipmunks). Simultaneously, large amounts of 'decommissioned' arms found their way into the storage depots of diverse – foremost Christian – militias.[5]

THE LOD MASSACRE

While preparing its onslaught on the fedayeen, and on the basis of their common interests, the Lebanese Christian leaders established first contacts with the Israelis. However, their meetings made Frangieh suspicious of Israeli intentions regarding southern Lebanon: he became convinced that the IDF was about to launch an invasion. As if to confirm such expectations, on 22 February the Israelis launched a large-scale raid on the districts of Bint Jebayl and Habbariyeh, in the south-east. For four days, the IDF/AF bombed and strafed not only the local fedayeen camps but also both towns, while the Israeli engineers bulldozed roads along the heights overlooking the villages of Kfar Chouba, Kfar Hammam and Habbariyeh. Knowing it would not be attacked, the Lebanese Army stood nearby, watching events unfold. When a single tank commander opened fire and his tank was destroyed in return, nobody complained. Henceforth, Israel maintained three observation posts on the Lebanese territory.[6]

Finding no other solution, Frangieh then forced his government and Arafat into a new agreement: the fedayeen were to stop challenging Lebanese sovereignty, while the armed forces were to seal the border. Keen to assert control over all the factions of the PLO, the Palestinian strongman purged most of the 'leftist' commanders among the top echelons – before having to back down half-way when this began causing rifts even within his own Fatah: the fact that the Lebanese legislation then allocated him US$200 million for arms acquisitions failed to help him complete this process. On the contrary, in addition to the IDF and the Lebanese armed forces, the PLO was now facing a myriad of Palestinian splinter factions, all aiming to assassinate its leaders and representatives. Eventually, Frangieh's and Arafat's initiatives were only effective for the militants under their control, i.e. those based in Lebanon – and often enough not even these. This became obvious when Wadie Haddad, commander of PFLP's armed wing, developed a new idea. At 22.00hrs local time on 30 May 1972, a Boeing 707 of Air France arrived at Lod, principal international airport of Israel, on a flight from Rome. Amongst other passengers, three men dressed conservatively and carrying slim violin cases disembarked and entered the waiting area: opening these, they extracted Czechoslovak-made vz.58 assault rifles and indiscriminately opened fire at the staff and visitors, and then tossing hand grenades. The security personnel returned fire, and it seems that some of the 26 people killed and 80 wounded in this atrocity were hit in the crossfire. While one of the terrorists was shot dead by another, the second returned into the landing area to open fire at passengers disembarking from another airliner, before being killed by one of his own grenades. The third was shot and captured by the airport security personnel. Subsequent investigation revealed that the assailants were all members of the North Korean-supported Japanese Red Army, acting on behalf of Haddad.[7] Moreover, by 1973, it became known that Black September had begun planning to hijack an airliner and crash it into the heart of Tel Aviv.[8]



Born in 1937 in Jaffa into a wealthy family that owned 24 square kilometres of orange groves and maintained good relations with its Jewish neighbours, Sabri Khalil al-Banna became best known as Abu Nidal ('Father of Struggle'). Successive traumatic experiences of his expulsion from Palestine, then from Saudi Arabia, Jordan, and finally from the PLO, turned him into a person widely described as a 'psychopath', and certainly one of the worst enemies of both the Palestinians and the Israelis. (IDF)

ABU NIDAL ORGANISATION

Additional problems were already in the making: perhaps the worst of all was the emergence of an extremist splinter group that was to epitomise international terrorism all through the 1970s, 1980s and well into the 1990s: the Abu Nidal Organisation (ANO). Led by Sabri Khalil al-Bannah – son of a wealthy orange plantation owner form Jaffa, ethnically cleansed in 1948 – this movement came into being soon after the Black September in Jordan. As of 1971-1972, it was still a part of the PLO, though a part of the leftist wing that was against Arafat and fiercely against any kind of negotiations with Israel. By 1973, it began running its own operations under such designations as the Fatah: The Revolutionary Council, Black June, Black September, the Revolutionary Arab Brigades, the Egyptian Revolution and others. By 1975, the ANO was based in Baghdad: however, although being officially supported by Iraq (which provided it with a training camp, a farm, newspaper, radio station, passports and extensive funding), the about 500-strong group began acting as a freelance contractor: Abu Nidal was a skilled merchant that ran a number of front companies the legal activities of which made him rich – while acting as cover for arms deals and mercenary activities. His split from the PLO was no secret: the ANO ran a number of operations against the Fatah by the mid-1970s, and Arafat, who considered Abu Nidal to be 'controlled by the Iraqi government' had him not only officially expulsed, but sentenced to death *in absentia*. Of course, as long as it was to their interest, all of this mattered little – if anything at all – to the Israeli leadership.[9]

MUNICH, HAMA AND DAMASCUS MASSACRES

As so often, subsequent developments were influenced by affairs taking place well outside the combat zone. On 16 July 1972, Egyptian President Anwar el-Sadat ordered all the 970 Soviet military advisors, and around 7,000 other military personnel, to leave Egypt by the end of the month. On 4 September 1972, members of the Fatah's Black September group – with some help of local Neo-Nazis – took 11 members of the Israeli Olympic team hostage in Munich. In turn, they demanded release of 234 Palestinians jailed in Israel, and the West German-held founders of the Red Army Faction. To say

this affair ended in a tragedy would be an understatement: while the German police killed five and captured three of the militants, all the hostages and one of the police officers were killed, too. The action backfired severely: although bringing the PLO to the title-pages of newspapers around the world, it benefitted Israel, which was seen as the victim of a terror attack, and the party with the right for revenge. Israel retaliated on 8 September 1972, by ordering the IDF/AF to bomb ten refugee camps in Lebanon and Syria. Particularly ferocious was the bombing of Hama, where the pilots of the A-4 Skyhawks and F-4E Phantom IIs involved made no distinction between the local refugee camps and nearby apartment buildings. A day later, the Phantoms attacked Damascus, and strafed even cars on the road along the Barada River. Over 200 Palestinian and Syrian civilians – many of them women and children – were killed.[10]

Hafez al-Assad was furious – not about the Israelis, but about Yasser Arafat. He had barely secured his position in Damascus through a series of assassinations and arrests of remaining oppositionals, and knew that his armed forces were still ill-prepared for a major war with Israel. While determined not to let anybody dictate his actions, he was doing everything possible to impose his decisions upon others: he unleashed his media into damning Egyptian President Sadat for his failure to launch a much expected new war against Israel, and attempted to find a replacement for Arafat. Moreover, he stopped all Palestinian operations against Israel from Syria proper, while ordering the SyAAF to hit back. At 1400hrs of the same day – 9 September 1972 – eight Su-7BMKs flew an air strike on Israeli positions in the Qunaitra area. Their mission ended in a fiasco: according to Syrian sources, two fighter bombers from the leading flight were shot down by ground fire (the Israelis claimed them as shot down by their interceptors), and another by a Mirage of the IDF/AF. All three pilots were killed before any of the 16 MiG-21s waiting for their return could intervene.[11]



In summer 1973, the SyAAF received a batch of 15 brand-new Su-20 fighter-bombers. Almost as large as an F-4E Phantom II, and capable of carrying up to 3,000kg of bombs, the type was considered a sort of a 'silver bullet' asset, and saw relatively little action during the October 1973 War. (Tom Cooper Collection)

The reaction of Beirut was also two-fold: President Frangieh declared a state of emergency, ordered the armed forces into a clampdown against the fedayeen, and intensified secret meetings with Israeli representatives. However, fed up of consistent Israeli disregard for the Lebanese sovereignty – between 1968 and 1974 the Lebanese armed forces recorded over 3,000 violations of their territory by the Israelis (averaging 1.4 incidents a day!) – the Army began shooting back at IDF/AF aircraft. Ultimately the result of all these actions was rather ironic. With Frangieh's negotiations with the Israelis remaining unknown, the public impression was that of 'little Lebanon daring, and big Syria not'. It earned Assad a status of a 'wimp' amongst the public at home and abroad – which made him even more furious. This experience was to determine his relations with the leader of the PLO for decades in advance, but also to prove decisive for his next step.[12]



Assad's pact with the Soviets of August 1972 secured large-scale deliveries of modern equipment for the Syrian armed forces. Amongst new items delivered were MiG-21M/MFs, one of which (serial number 1532) is visible in this photograph, together with pilots of the Blei-based No. 80 Squadron. (R. S. Collection)

ASSAD'S PACT WITH THE SOVIETS

Meanwhile, shocked by Sadat's 'kick out order', Moscow was quick in turning to Damascus. Eager to secure a replacement for what was their principal ally in the Middle East in the 1955-1972 period, the Soviets made generous offers for arms and advisors to Assad. Initially sceptical and fresh from destroying the Syrian Communist party by assassinating or incarcerating about 3,000 of its members, the Syrian strongman found Moscow's offers hard to turn down, even more so because during the first two years of his rule, the country experienced a period of rapid economic growth. Following several weeks of negotiations, Assad then agreed to let the Soviets completely reorganize and massively expand his armed forces in order to make these capable of running an all-out war against Israel. Unsurprisingly, the first 150 Soviet advisors arrived in Damascus by August 1972. Amongst them was Alexander G Vagin:

> I came to Syria almost straight from Egypt and found the Syrians having higher combat readiness, [and] much stronger minded and better than the Egyptians as pilots. Ultimately, they proved to be the only Arab pilots capable of "appeasing" the Israelis in air combat. They were true hooligans of the sky, and would not listen to the instructor.[13]

Moreover, in November 1972, the USSR launched a massive airlift to Syria – the so far biggest operation of this kind in its history: including not only medium-sized Antonov An-12s, but also giant An-22s, Moscow literally flooded Syria with additional and new weapons systems. Continued through December of the same year, and then January-April 1973, this brought not only 40 new MiG-21MFs and 12 Su-7BMKs for the SyAAF, but also a batch of 15 brand-new Sukhoi Su-20 fighter-bombers. During the same period, the SyAA was bolstered through deliveries of hundreds of additional T-55s and BTR-152s, but also T-62 MBTs, BTR-60 APCs and BMP-1 infantry fighting vehicles, while the Navy received missile boats.[14]

BATTLE DAYS

Exploiting the ongoing disunity within the PLO caused by Arafat's attempt to purge the organisation of extremists and leftists, the Israelis reinforced their air strikes in October and then continued them into November 1972. Undertaken in complete disregard for the 'price paid' by the local population, over the following weeks, then months and finally, years, this method of war against the Palestinians converted into a 'total war' – and then one in which Israel's strategy of deterrence began to fail, no matter if it attacked the PLO directly or indirectly.[15]

Indeed, just like in 1968-1969, the consequences of Israeli air strikes on Lebanon of late 1972 were nothing short of catastrophic. Instead of targeting the militants – which were hard to find and even harder to track down – they increasingly targeted the infrastructure, resulting in the collapse of the economy: unemployment exploded driving thousands into the arms of the Lebanese leftist parties. Simultaneously, emboldened by his expanding economy and Soviet support, and keen to re-establish his reputation with the public, Assad ordered both Saiqa and the PFLP-GC into another wave of attacks on Israel. Israel retaliated by bombing Syria, to which Syria retaliated by… at least trying to bomb Israel…

One of the initial results is frequently ignored, if not outright belittled by military historians: what became known as the 'Battle Days' – a series of clashes between Israel and Syria of 1972 – attracted little attention even in Israel. If at all, most of the resulting engagements were quickly declared as overwhelming and cheaply won successes: Israeli pilots and tank-crews on both sides were decorated for high numbers of kills they may have scored, and that was that. On the contrary, the Battle Days were widely publicised in the Arab media and became so popular that the reporting about them began exercising pressure upon Egyptian President Sadat in particular. They created the impression that 'Syria was fighting for the Arab cause, Egypt and others not'. Moreover, they also served the purpose of preparing the Syrian armed forces for the next major war with Israel. Sadat's reaction was rather unusual: actually preparing for the same war but not yet ready, and while maintaining the cease-fire on the front along the Suez Canal, he ordered the deployment of MiG-17Fs of No. 62 Squadron of the Egyptian Air Force (EAF) to Syria, to bolster the SyAAF: commanded by Fikry el-Gindy, this unit was trained to counter US-made MIM-23 HAWK SAMs. It arrived at as-Seen AB in November 1972.[16]

The Egyptians arrived 'just in time' to see involvement in an entire series of Battle Days. On 9 November, 12 F-4E Phantoms all bombed the same Syrian SAM-site, completely obliterating it and killing most of the crew. Syrian artillery retaliated by shelling the Israeli positions on the Golan, to which the Israelis reacted with more air strikes. The SyAAF scrambled its interceptors and claimed four kills in the ensuing air combat, in exchange for two losses. Israel denied any losses and credited its pilots with two MiG-21s. Following another fedayeen attack on Israel, the IDF/AF hit back with the bombardment of Syrian positions along the Purple Line, on 21 November 1972. The SyAAF hit back – around 1400hrs, as meanwhile usual – with artillery, tanks and air strikes that attempted to hit the NWC near Lake Tiberias, inside Israel. A pitched air-ground battle ensued that stretched over eight hours, during which Israel claimed six MiG-21s and 15 MBTs as destroyed. Damascus confirmed only one MiG lost (the pilot reportedly ejected safely over friendly ground troops), but Alexander G Vagin, one of the Soviet advisors that arrived in Damascus in August 1972, recalled dramatic SyAAF losses:

> The attack on the NWC was a mission planned to be launched in response to an Israeli raid. We had spent an entire day calculating everything and intended to have several groups of aircraft attacking from different directions, separated in speed and altitude, and along carefully selected routes, depending on terrain. However, Naji Jamil changed the plan at the last moment without consulting me. The result was that two of the attacking groups were intercepted and became involved in a big dogfight. The flights underway at low altitude managed to escape, but those flying higher became involved in air combats. We lost 9 out of 14 aircraft involved, and shot down only two Israelis.[17]

Shukri Tabet, a Palestinian born in Beersheba in 1946 and who grew up in the Gaza Strip before joining the SyAAF in 1967, explained the outcome of the battle in the form of exactly the same critique one can hear from other veteran Syrian fighter-pilots of the time:

> Syrian pilots were very brave, very talented and highly trained. But, their weapons and intentions were to their disadvantage… the MiG-21 was not a very good aircraft. One had to fly below the target to be able to deploy R-3S missiles, and approach to within 200-300m [656-984ft] for the gun to be effective. If one pulled more than 2.5gs, the missiles did not function and during



Many aerial clashes during the Battle Days were caused by overflights by Israeli reconnaissance aircraft, like this modified Mirage IIICJ. While usually serving as an interceptor, the aircraft's nose containing the Cyrano radar could be replaced by this local modification, including a US-manufactured long-range oblique photography (LOROP) camera. Notable is the total of 13 kill markings applied below the cockpit – most of these claimed during the two 'Wars of Attrition' with Egypt and Syria, in the period 1967-1973. (IDF)

air battles we were pulling more than this all the time. Our equipment was almost at the level of World War II![18]

However, the Soviets ignored such complaints, putting all the blame upon Syrian pilots. Vagin explained:

> The Syrians complained that our missiles were bad, and that this was the reason for this sad loss. A few days later, Naji told this to President Assad. I understood what he meant and turned to the president, telling him, "This cannot be true. Over Vietnam, 97% of American aircraft were shot down by missiles'. I told him it was his own pilots that did not know how to use missiles. We offered them a training plan, but no exercises were undertaken because these were too costly (one live-firing exercise cost around US$40,000)…The president said something to Naji, and he turned red as [a] tomato. "Tomorrow", he said, and went away. After four days, they came back and told me that Naji agreed with my suggestions…I flew a demonstrative mission and both of my missiles hit the simulated target. The same with guns – no miss. After that, Naji had no more questions.

Actually, even after their tour of duty in Egypt, the Soviets had no experience of their own in modern warfare: they had not fought any air war since Korea of 1953, and even less so any including the deployment of their air-to-air missiles. Lacking independent data concerning the combat deployment of MiG-21s by North Vietnam (which would clearly demonstrate that Vagin's arguments were completely worthless, because the North Vietnamese suffered exactly the same problems with the R-3S' reliability as Egypt and Syria), they insisted. However, exercises and real combat were two entirely different affairs: having captured several dozen R-3S missiles on the Sinai during the June 1967 War, the Israelis knew that this was a relatively primitive weapon. It could only be deployed from an aircraft pulling no more than 2gs, and track targets pulling no more than 2.5gs. This meant that any Israeli aircraft flying a turn at 3gs or more was certain to evade. Moreover, while praising the North Vietnamese, the Soviets not only failed to objectively study their combat experiences, but also never collected any statistics to find out how many of the R-3S' that were fired had actually hit their targets.[19]

The net result was the conclusion that the SyAAF could not win air combats against the IDF/AF. Without winning air combats, it could not win aerial superiority, and without air superiority the Syrian Army could not hope to operate effectively in the next war against Israel. The solution that the Soviets eventually offered was to establish an entirely new branch of the armed forces: the Syrian Arab Air Defence Force (SyAADF), the task for which would be to seal the skies over the battlefield against the IDF/AF. Assad and Jamil agreed and the Soviets delivered: while continuing their air bridge, they worked feverishly, training enough personnel to establish 49 battalions equipped with SAMs (each battalion operated one SAM site), 36 of which became operational by October 1973. These units, plus those equipped with anti-aircraft artillery were combined with six Soviet-made P-14 and P-14F early warning radars (ASCC/NATO-codename 'Tall King'), and integrated with the help of two ASURK-1ME automated tactical management systems (ATMS). Moreover, the Soviets delivered two Vozdukh-1ME ATMS to integrate the operations of ground-based air defences with that of manned interceptors. The result was the establishment of the first integrated air defence system (IADS) over south-western Syria, in May 1973: a fully automatic, computer-supported system enabling the commanders to exercise command, control and communication (C3) functions. According to currently available data, the SyAADF's IADS of 1973 was capable of simultaneously tracking a total of 48 targets, and coordinating engagements of 24 of these by MiG-21s and SAMs.[20]

By the time the Syrian IADS was established, Assad was already involved in secret negotiations with Sadat, aimed at forging an alliance for a new war with Israel. Consequently, the Syrian armed forces stopped their Battle Days and fully concentrated on preparing for the next major conflict. Thus began the calamity that was to cost the Syrians dearly – not only during the October 1973 War, but especially in June 1982.

MAY 1973 WAR

Around 1300hrs of 2 January 1973, at least 12 Israeli and 6 Syrian interceptors clashed in the skies over Beirut. In an air combat that lasted for 20 minutes and ended over the snow-covered peaks of the Lebanese mountains the SyAAF lost two MiG-21s: one exploded over Mount Keserwan, while the other crashed a few kilometres further east. An unidentified jet, believed to be Israeli, crashed into the sea off Abde, a village in northern Lebanon close to the border with Syria. While nothing is known about the fate of one Syrian pilot, the other, Lieutenant Nabil Borqot, ejected safely and was returned to Syria.[21]

At 0100hrs on the morning of 21 February, the IDF launched a combined, air, land, and sea assault on the PFLP-controlled camps of Nahr el-Bared and al-Badawi, north of Tripoli, and destroyed both of these. On 10 April 1973, the IDF struck at the heart of the Fatah, deploying commandos to kill its commanders Abou

Youssef and Kamal Adwan, and the PLO spokesman Kamal Nasser, in their Beirut homes before escaping into the night. No resistance was offered by the Lebanese armed forces. Subsequent funerals drew dozens of thousands of the Lebanese and Palestinians to the streets of Beirut, where they chanted slogans against the Lebanese government and its 'reactionary politicians'. Frangieh reacted by reshuffling his cabinet, but this offended nearly everybody – foremost the Sunni notables – and actually started the final countdown to the civil war. Assad added to Frangieh's problems by eventually forcing him into a new treaty with the PLO: signed in May 1973, the Melkhart Agreement granted wider freedoms to the Palestinians than ever before, and de-facto legitimised the PLO's extraterritorial rights in Lebanon. For all practical purposes, the Palestinians now had a para-state in the country.[22]



While well-armed for a relatively poorly organized militant group, the PLO's factions lacked heavy weapons early during the 'Civil War' in Lebanon. Most such equipment consisted of M38 jeeps (usually captured from the stocks of the Lebanese armed forces), converted into so-called 'technicals' through the installation of a 106mm recoilless gun, as in this photo, or a heavy machine gun. (Albert Grandolini Collection)

At this point in time, the Christian Phalangists decided to take matters into their own hands. While the Christians could lean upon the Lebanese armed forces to obtain weapons and ammunition, the Muslim factions were unable. Thus, they were de-facto driven into the hands of the PLO. To say that this aggravated the internecine strife would be an understatement. On 27 April, the Lebanese police arrested three members of the PDFLP at Beirut IAP while these were attempting to board an Air France flight to Paris while carrying 10kg of TNT. In retaliation, early on 2 May 1973, members of the PDFLP arrested two NCOs of the Lebanese Army on the streets of Beirut. Reacting on their own, the Lebanese armed forces then surrounded the Shatila refugee camp and issued an ultimatum to release their two officers. The military later claimed that the fedayeen fired first: true or not, at 1145hrs the Lebanese Army opened fire into Shatila, causing dozens of fires and hundreds of casualties. As the army then also surrounded the camps of Mar Elias, Burj el-Barajneh, Jisr al-Bachra, Tel az-Za'tar, and Dbayeh, and subjected all of these to shelling from its tanks, the fighting rapidly spread. By the time the crisis was finally solved and the two NCOs were released, the next morning, the Lebanese armed forces had suffered as many as 50 casualties, and the fedayeen up to 100. However, Arafat had lost control over the extremist elements in his camp: indeed, these were reinforced by a large, well-armed- and well-trained group of Syrian-based fedayeen.[23]

MELKART AGREEMENT

Early on 3 May 1973, fighting erupted between the PDFLP and PFLP-GC over the control of the Sabra refugee camp. Before long, Fatah, then Saiqa and finally the Lebanese Army and gendarmerie became involved, the latter pouring tank- and artillery fire into Tel Zaatar and Dbayeh. Moreover, later during the day reports began to reach Beirut that the Yarmouk Brigade of the PLA (the unit consisting of about 300 defectors from the 2nd Infantry Division of the Jordanian Army) had crossed the border from Syria and was underway in a western direction. Alarmed, Frangieh put not only the Lebanese armed forces on alert, but also ordered the FAL into action – for the first time in its history. Mirages from Rayak AB flew an air strike against Sabra camp and the fedayeen that were meanwhile attacking Beirut IAP. Hard on their heels, Hunters and even armed CM.170 Magisters followed, concentrating most of their air strikes on the area around the Football Stadium in southern Beirut. Finally, the Hunters also rocketed positions of the Yarmouk Brigade's anti-aircraft equipment brought in from Syria.[24]

Through an intervention of President Sadat, who made telephone calls to both Beirut and Damascus, the two sides agreed to a cease-fire starting from 5 May 1973: for a while at least, not only Frangieh's position vis-à-vis Arafat, but also Ghanem's standing were improved to a degree where they subjected the PLO to military authority, and where Arafat was forced into toning down the wording of any of public statements. However, this new arrangement found no sympathies in Damascus or amongst all the fedayeen commanders. On 8 May 1973, the Saiqa, the PDFLP and the Lebanese Communist Party unleashed an indiscriminate rocket attack upon Beirut. Frangieh reacted by ordering Mirages and Hunters into renewed air strikes on Sabra and Shatila refugee camps, the next morning: these were followed by ground assaults. Fighting also erupted in the Sidon and Tyre area, where the fedayeen subsequently established themselves in control. The Palestinians and their Lebanese allies were less successful in Beirut, the Beka'a Valley – where they were reinforced by further PLA elements from Syria – and along the border to Israel, though: hit by a series of artillery barrages and additional air strikes, they suffered extensive losses. However, by this time, the Lebanese economy worsened by another degree: due to the fighting, many workers could not reach their companies, and prices for foodstuff rose sharply. Frangieh thus did not feel in a position to launch the long-planned, 'ultimate' crackdown upon the Palestinian militants: instead, the fighting

petered out almost on its own, by 10 May 1973, with most of the involved parties still in their original positions.[25]

Following extensive negotiations, on 17 May 1973, representatives of the Palestinians and the Lebanese met in the Hotel Melkart in Beirut to sign the Melkart Protocol: although not official, this forced the PLO to stop cross-border raids into Israel, stay 8-10 kilometres away from the border, cease using Beirut as an information and propaganda base, cease using refugee camps for training of militants and remove all its heavy weapons from the same, and remove all the 'foreign elements', i.e. non-Arabs, from its ranks and from Lebanon. While most of this agreement was fulfilled, its ultimate result was even greater dissatisfaction of the Palestinians and the Lebanese leftists, Sunnis, and the Syrians: the unavoidable civil war in Lebanon was put 'on hold', merely postponed to a more suitable point in time. [26]

RELY ON YOURSELVES: LEBANESE MILITIAS[27]

While the Melkart Protocol stopped the May 1973 war in Lebanon, it prompted most of the country's communities to start looking inwards. As so often, the first step was taken by the Christians. A few days after the agreement was signed, Frangieh called the two other most significant Christian leaders – Camille Chamoun and Pierre Gemayel – to his office and told them: 'I realize the consequence of this decision; after today, there is no Lebanese army. Rely on yourselves.'[28]

Over the following two years, dozens of private armies emerged, all waiting for the spark that would ignite the war. While often mentioned rather briefly – if not entirely ignored – in relation to subsequent developments, including the Israeli invasion of Lebanon in 1982, the relations between these groups have had a major impact on the position of the Palestinians in the country. In very rough terms, the groups in question could be described as 'split into three major blocks': one favouring the government and the Christian dominance, one fighting for a mix of leftist, pan-Arabist or Syrian nationalist parties; and one consisting of diverse autonomous groups. For reasons of simplicity, the following review cites only about a dozen of the factions dominating the scene in the mid-1970s.



The build-up of diverse militias was initiated by the Christians before Lebanese independence, but it never became as intensive as in the period of 1973-1975 when, fearing a PLO-led revolt, the Maronites established several powerful organisations. Their oldest, largest and best organised became the militia of the right-wing Lebanese Christian Kataeb Party – also known as the 'Phalange'. Founded in 1937, and active during the civil war of 1958, it was disbanded in 1961. In 1963, it was re-established in eastern Beirut and initially consisted of two company-sized 'special forces' outfits, the 1st and 2nd Commando. By 1975 it was re-organized and expanded as



The militia of the right-wing Christian Kataeb Party – colloquially 'the Phalanga', or the KRF – was already heavily armed before the outbreak of the Lebanese Civil War. Several of its units operated heavy artillery pieces. (Albert Grandolini Collection)



This truck was converted into a 'technical' through the installation of an automatic anti-aircraft cannon on its bed. The vehicle was operated by the Zgharta Liberation Army (ZLA). (Albert Grandolini Collection)

the Kataeb Regulatory Forces (KRF). Headquartered in the town of Bikfaya – the feudal seat of the Gemayel family – the KRF mustered about 2,000 full-time regulars, backed by up to 3,000 irregulars. The Phalange of the mid-1970s was clandestinely supported by the Lebanese Army, Egypt and Jordan, but also by right-wing sympathisers from Spain, France, Belgium and elsewhere in Europe, and thus armed with a wide mix of fire-arms and light artillery, diverse jeeps, and some of ex-army vehicles like Charioteer tanks, AMX-13 and M41 light tanks, M42 Duster self-propelled anti-aircraft guns (SPAAGs), AML-90, Cadillac Gage V-100 Commando and Staghound armoured cars, a few APCs, and diverse artillery pieces. These were organised into numerous autonomous battalions and companies, each of which was responsible for all operations in their home districts: only the Phalange's 'Commando' units were deployed for mobile operations.

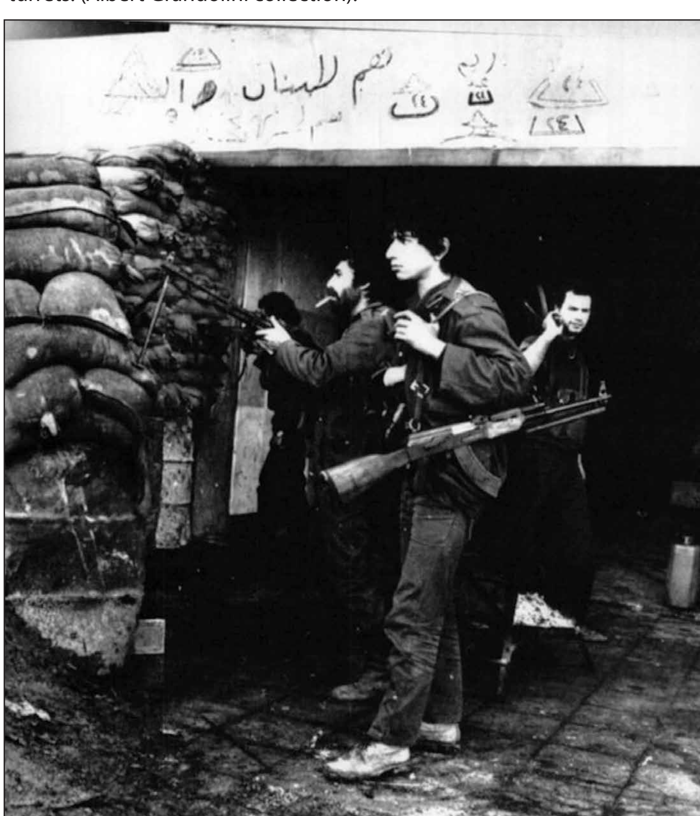


Two Staghound armoured cars of the Lebanese Arab Army. Both were almost certainly taken from stocks of the Lebanese ground forces and brought to the LAA by defecting officers. Notable is the installation of heavy machine guns with protective shields atop of their turrets. (Albert Grandolini collection).

Even more of a 'private army' was the militia run by the Frangieh family. Established in 1967 in Tripoli and Zgharta, the Marada Brigade (also known as the Zgharta Liberation Army, ZLA) consisted of mechanised infantry (mounted on M113s and diverse technicals, and armed with a mix of Yugoslav and Soviet-made heavy machine guns and light automatic cannons), 'commandos', medical and military police branches, and was commanded by the president's son, Tony.

In 1976, a faction of Maronite Christians and Greek-Catholics split from the Lebanese armed forces and named itself the Army of Free Lebanon (AFL). Led by Colonel Antoine Barakat (Maronite Christian), it declared its loyalty to President Frangieh. Headquartered at Shukri Ghanem Barracks at Fayadieh, it totalled about 3,000 uniformed regulars organised into company-sized formations (mostly wearing simple numeric designations, but including the Akkar Brigade and the Marjayoun-Qlaiaa Formation), in which rank and seniority meant little, and most of the commanders were young officers. Like the ZLA, the AFL was equipped with a mix of French, US and Belgian-made assault rifles and machine guns, but included a strong mechanised component equipped with AMX-13 and M41 Walker Bulldog tanks, AML-90 and Staghound armoured cars, M113 and Panhard M3 VTT APCs, as well as British-made 25-Pounder field guns, Soviet-made D-30 and French BF-50 howitzers.

The Guardians of the Cedars was a militia of the far-right, ultranationalist Lebanese Renewal Party. Established by Étienne Saqr in 1974, it was fiercely anti-Palestinian, anti-Syrian, and anti-Arab. Headquartered in Ashrafieh, mostly cooperating with the Phalange, and reportedly receiving support from Israel right from the start, it was originally equipped with obsolete firearms purchased on the black market and staffed by Maronite deserters from the Lebanese armed forces. In early 1976, the collapse of the Lebanese armed forces resulted in its rapid growth: by the end of the year it totalled about 6,000, equipped with modern fire-arms and at least some heavy equipment. The Guardians were foremost active in east Beirut, but maintained a presence in the Jezzine, Marjayoun and Qlaiaa areas.



Contrary to Jordan in 1970, in Lebanon in the mid-1970s the PLO could count on the cooperation of numerous militias of the local leftists, Arab Nationalists, and several religious groups. These leftist militiamen from the group that named itself the '24 October Movement' were photographed in front of their sandbag protected headquarters in Beirut. (Albert Grandolini Collection)



Originally a small group of leftists that acted as de-facto proxies of the PLO, the Morabitoun was to grow significantly. Thanks to widespread defections of Lebanese Muslims, it was also heavily armed. This group of technicals – mostly diverse Toyota trucks and one UNIMOG – was equipped with Soviet-made ZU-23 and similar automatic anti-aircraft cannons, which saw widespread application in ground warfare. (Albert Grandolini Collection)

The Lebanese Arab Army (LAA, also *Armée du Liban Arabe*, ALA) was a predominantly Muslim faction of the Lebanese armed forces established in January 1976 through the defection of Muslim troops of the 1st Armoured Brigade. The mutiny quickly spread and even attracted a number of officers from the Syrian Army, enabling the LAA – led by Lieutenant Ahmed al-Khatib – to bring all the predominantly Muslim areas, and all the army bases and posts between Tyre and Baalbek in the south, all the way to Tripoli in the north under its control. Supported by the PLO, Iraq and Libya, at its peak, the LAA totalled about 4,000 heavily armed troops of Muslim origin that fought against the Christians and sided with the PLO.

The al-Mourabiton was a successor of the small militia created by Lebanese Nasserite activists in 1957. As a staunch supporter of the Palestinian cause, it began as a group of only 150 combatants, in 1975, but rapidly grew into to about 3,000 men and women – mostly leftists from the Muslim quarters of west Beirut. Led by Ibrahim Kulayat, it consisted of stubborn and determined fighters that originally operated as urban guerrillas, but subsequently developed into a semi-conventional force. Already as of 1976, it operated a small armoured unit equipped with Sherman Fireflies and Charioteers, M42s, a few AML-90, Cadillac V-100 Commando, and Staghound armoured cars, and numerous other vehicles, supported by a sizeable collection of artillery pieces. Although losing much of its support due to atrocities against non-Muslims, in the late 1970s, the Mourabiton still played an important role in the fighting south of Beirut in 1982, by when it counted about 7,000 combatants.

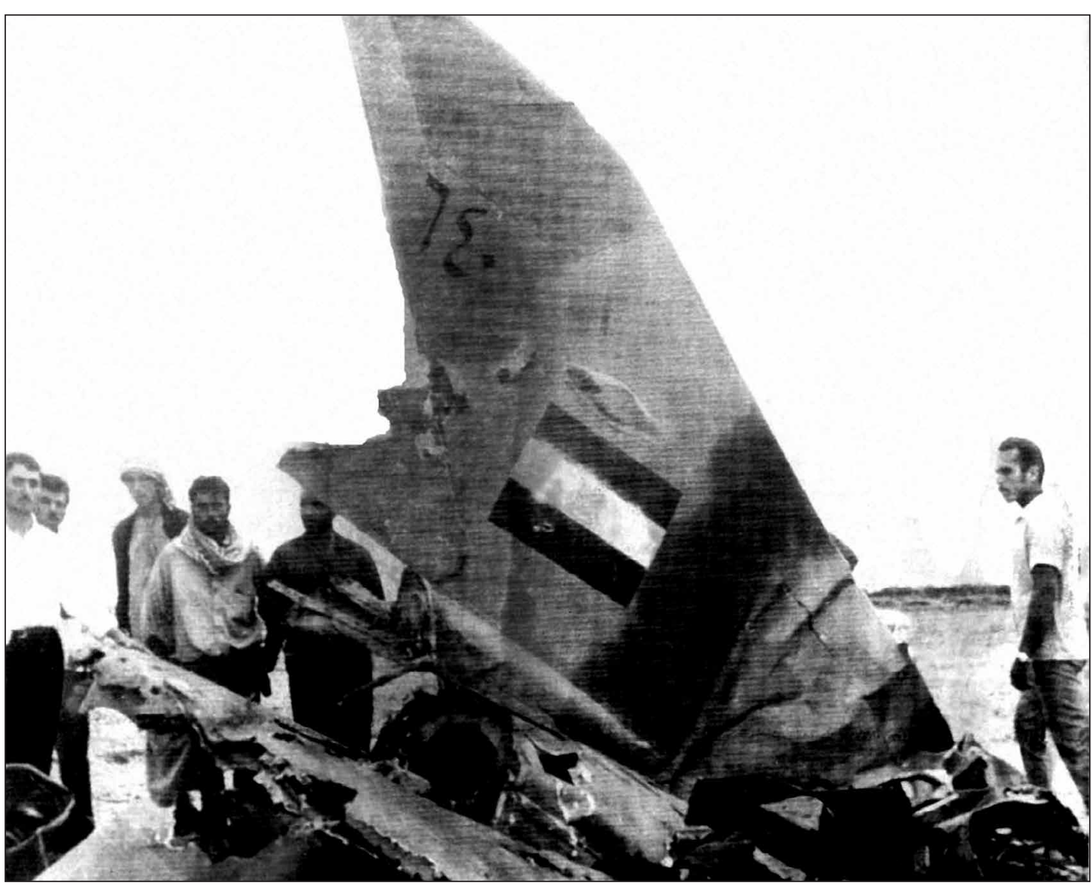
The Druze Progressive Socialist Party of Lebanon began establishing its own militia in 1958. Disbanded soon after the US military intervention, this was re-established in early 1975 under the leadership of the Kamal Jumblatt as the People's Liberation Army (PLA). The PLA mustered around 2,500 lightly armed troops drawn from the Druze and Shi'a communities in the Chouf: supportive of Lebanon's Arab identity, it sympathised with the PLO. Although Arafat provided it with arms and ammunition, the PLA grew slowly, and suffered heavy losses during the Israeli invasion. Subsequently reorganised by Wallid Jumblatt, it turned into a disciplined, well-trained force of more than 5,000 regular troops (with about 12,000 reservists) almost exclusively equipped with Soviet-made arms.

Although significantly depleted by peace-time- and combat attrition, the Israeli fleet of Mirage IIICJs had been continuously upgraded: by 1973, it carried such advanced air-to-air missiles as US-made AIM-9D Sidwinders, and Israeli-made Shafrir Mk.IIs, both of which vastly outperformed the old, Soviet–made R-3S installed on Syrian MiG-21s. For this reason, Israeli Mirages remained the most potent air superiority weapon of the Middle East. (IDF)

OCTOBER 1973 ARAB-ISRAELI WAR

One of the reasons for the Lebanese Civil War not erupting in late 1973 was the outbreak of the next major armed conflict between Arabs and Israel in October of that year. Similar to the June 1967 War, the prelude to this was another air combat between the IDF/AF and the SyAAF, though this time fought in the skies of Lebanon. On 13 September 1973, a major shipment of

Soviet weapons for Syria arrived in the ports of Lattakia and Tartous. Correspondingly, the IDF/AF launched a reconnaissance mission in that direction, around 1400hrs local time. Determined to prevent the Israelis from taking photographs of the unloading process and thus discover what type of equipment had arrived, the SyAAF scrambled four MiG-21PFMs from Hama AB. The MiGs caught up with Israeli reconnaissance aircraft – identified as a pair of McDonnell-Douglas RF-4E Phantom IIs – and these turned away, dragging the pursuers in front of a four-ship each of Mirage IIICJs and F-4Es. Although the lead Syrian pilot fired two R-3S missiles to claim one of the reconnaissance Phantoms, the Israelis denied suffering any such losses. In turn, the Israeli Mirage-flight pounced on the Syrian formation from below, shoot down two MiG-21s and forced the remaining two to retreat. The second four-ship of Syrian MiGs then engaged the Israelis off the coast near Tartous. However, while approaching the combat zone, this was jumped by four additional Mirages and lost three aircraft in quick succession. The fourth Syrian pilot, Captain Essam Hallaq, then destroyed an Israeli Mirage 5, the pilot of which ejected over the sea off the Lebanese coast. He came down only some 600m (1,969ft) away from one of the downed Syrian pilots. When the IDF/AF despatched helicopters to recover its pilot – and the Syrian nearby – both sides vectored additional sections of interceptors into the area. Once again, the poor Syrian radar coverage of the Lebanese coast enabled the Israelis to take their opponents by surprise, and shoot down three SyAAF MiG-21s. Eventually, Israel credited its pilots with 12 confirmed kills and one 'probable', in exchange for one loss; the Syrians claimed eight Israeli jets as destroyed in exchange for five own losses, and Captain Adeeb el-Gar was subsequently highly decorated for 'downing two Phantoms in air combat over Beirut'.[29]



This Syrian MiG-21M (serial number 640) was shot down in air combat with the Israelis on 13 September 1973 and crashed near Beirut in Lebanon. At least three SyAAF pilots are known to have ejected over that country during this air battle: all suffered minor injuries and were subsequently returned to Syria. (Albert Grandolini Collection)



Hafez el-Assad decorated Adib el-Gar with the 'Hero of the Syrian Arab Republic' medal – 'for destroying two enemy Phantoms in air combat over Beirut' – after the October 1973 War. More recently it became known that el-Gar's highly successful career in the SyAAF was foremost based on him marrying the daughter of the contemporary commander of the air force. (R. S. Collection)

While some of the Israelis later considered this clash as an ignored indication of the coming war, their military intelligence service, AMAN, convinced itself and top military- and political leaders of the country that Syria would never attack without Egypt doing so, while Egypt would not attack Israel without obtaining an air force capable of matching the IDF/AF – which, as of 1973, was far from

being the case. A further distraction for the Israeli authorities took place in the form of a hijacking of a train carrying Jewish emigrants from the USSR in transit through Austria, on 28 September 1973, by the Syrian-supported Saiqa. Austrian Chancellor Bruno Kreisky gave in to their demands and granted the militants free escort to Libya in exchange for hostages. With this incident keeping the Israeli government busy for days longer, when Egypt and Syria then *did* launch their joint attack, on 6 October 1973, they took Israel by surprise. Lebanon kept itself out of the war, but could not avoid getting involved: both the IDF/AF and the SyAAF made use of the Lebanese airspace. Indeed, in preparation for their major air strikes on Syrian air bases, the Israelis bombed the dysfunctional FAL radar site at Jebel Barouk, on 9 October, destroying its antenna and most of the electronic equipment in the process.[30]

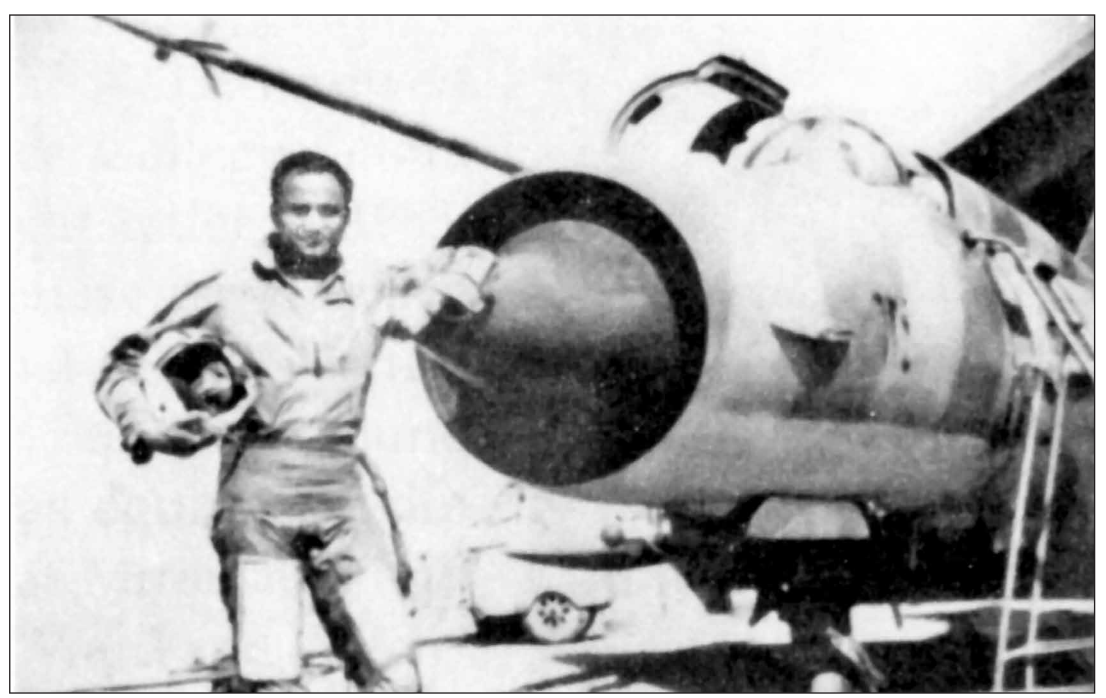
The only 'Palestinian' militant group active during the October War was the ANO. On 5 September 1973, five of its gunmen seized the Saudi embassy in Paris. Taking 11 hostages, they demanded the release of several compatriots jailed in Jordan. Furthermore, on 25 November 1973, three ANO gunmen hijacked a Boeing 747 of the KLM underway from Amsterdam to Tokyo while this was within Iraqi airspace. Following days-long negotiations and landings in Damascus, Nicosia, Tripoli, and Malta, the hijackers finally released all the hostages and surrendered to authorities of the United Arab Emirates (UAE) in Dubai.

WAR OF ATTRITION IN 1974

The Syrian armed forces not only suffered massive losses during the October 1973 War, but also lost all of their initial gains. Indeed, by the time a US-negotiated cease-fire 'officially' ended the fighting, Israel held a sizeable salient of Syrian territory between Qunaitra and Damascus, east of the Purple Line. Nevertheless, Hafez al-Assad proved uncompromising: he not only declined direct negotiations with Israel and refused to provide even the list of prisoners of war, but demanded that the IDF withdraw from all of the Golan Heights. When Israel refused, Assad initiated a low-intensity war of attrition, aiming to exhaust his opponent. The initial phase of this conflict was characterised by artillery exchanges and small-scale raids in the Jebel Sheikh area. Bad weather during the following winter and the necessity to rebuild the Syrian armed forces brought a temporary halt to operations. However, as soon as the snow on Jebel Sheikh began to melt, the Syrians were in action again. During the night from 5 to 6 April 1974, the SyAADF repositioned its SAM-sites closer to the Israeli-controlled salient and then claimed an F-4E Phantom II as shot down the next morning. Later during the day, IDF/AF A-4s bombed Syrian troop concentrations and armoured vehicles that were advancing towards the summit of the Jebel Sheikh. Furthermore, on 11 April 1974 three members of the PFLP-GC infiltrated Israel from Lebanon to attack the town of Qiryat Shimona. Finding the local school unoccupied, they entered another building nearby to murder 18 and wound 16. When the militants realized they were surrounded by Israeli soldiers all three blew themselves up. Two days later, the IDF/AF retaliated by deploying A-4s to bomb six villages in Lebanon. On 14 April 1974, the Syrians launched a ground offensive on the Israeli observation post on Jebel Sheikh, provoking an air battle in which the SyAAF lost the MiG-21MF flown by Major Ghassan Abboud – an officer officially credited with six kills during the October 1973 War – while the Israeli Skyhawks premiered the deployment of so-called 'chaff bombs': weapons designed to deploy clouds of small, thin pieces of aluminium, which then appear as a cluster of primary targets on radar screens and thus disrupt enemy air defences.[31]

Although their assault on Jebel Sheikh proved unsuccessful, the Syrians kept Israel under pressure. Two nights later, the SyAADF re-deployed its SAM-sites into the area, as recalled by one of its retired officers:

> We set up a trap during the night from 17 to 18 April: we moved several Kvadrat sites [export variant of the 2K12 Kub, ASCC/NATO-codename 'SA-6 Gainful'] closer to Jebel Sheikh, but did not activate them. Acting as bait, our MiGs flew intensive patrols the following morning: when enemy interceptors appeared to engage, we hit them with SAMs.[32]



Arriving too late to take part in the October 1973 War, a group of six Pakistani pilots was assigned to the SyAAF during the Israeli-Syrian War of Attrition in 1974. While one of them claimed an aerial victory against an Israeli Mirage IIICJ on 19 April 1974 (while flying a MiG-21F-13), and this was widely reported, it remains unconfirmed. This photograph shows Pakistani Squadron Leader Arif Manzoor, the commander of that detachment, with the SyAAF MiG-21M serial number 624, in 1974. (Albert Grandolini Collection)

Damascus subsequently claimed three Israeli fighter-bombers as shot down on 18 April, and then 10 F-4Es and A-4s on the morning of 19 April by SAMs, in addition to a further 'seven Phantoms' in exchange for two MiG-21s in air combats. This was certainly a considerable exaggeration: Israel credited two of its Mirage pilots with confirmed kills: while denying having suffered any losses in air combat, it admitted the loss of a Phantom and a Skyhawk each to ground-based air defences.[33]

Following additional clashes on the ground, on 26 April 1974 four formations of Syrian MiG-17s attacked Israeli positions on

Jebel Sheikh again. When Israeli interceptors attempted to counter, they clashed with MiG-21s – including two that were flown by Pakistani pilots – and a major air battle ensued, in which the two belligerents claimed a combined total of four MIGs, three F-4Es and one Mirage as shot down. Israel denied any such losses, and credited its Mirage and Phantom pilots with four additional MiG-21-kills on 29 April 1974.[34]

Heightened tensions eventually prompted the US government to intensify its efforts to effect a new cease-fire. However, as Henry Kissinger, the National Security Advisor of the US President Richard B Nixon, ran the mission of 'shuttle diplomacy' between Damascus and Tel Aviv, the DFLP launched a major raid from Lebanon. Early on 13 May 1974, a group of its militants attacked the Ma'alot settlement: they massacred an entire family before moving into the local elementary school to take 85 students and several teachers hostage, while demanding the release of 23 Arab and 3 other prisoners in return. A tense stand-off with security forces went through the next night: the Israelis expressed preparedness to negotiate, but the Palestinians refused. At 1725hrs of 14 May 1974, the IDF deployed its General Staff Reconnaissance Unit (Unit 269, more commonly known as Sayeret Matkal): their poorly coordinated operation resulted in a major exchange of fire, in which 22 students and all three militants were killed, while more than 50 were wounded. A day later, the IDF/AF bombed the headquarters and bases of the DFLP and PFLP in Lebanon, killing at least 27 and wounding 138. In return, at least one of its A-4s was damaged by a new weapon in the PLO's arsenal: the Soviet-made 9K32M Strela-2M (ASCC/NATO-codename 'SA-7b Grail') man-portable air defence system (MANPAD).[35]

LEBANESE CIVIL WAR 1975

Although the situation along the border between Israel and Lebanon remained tense, no further large-scale attacks are known to have taken place over the following 12 months. On the contrary, through early 1975 it was the tensions of a 'local' nature that lead to the much-expected war. On 26 February 1975, a protest of fishermen in Sidon against a joint Lebanese-Kuwaiti company aimed to impose Camille Chamoun's monopoly on serving the interests of the Christian political elite got out of control: after an exchange of small-arms fire, the demonstrators used dynamite and Soviet-made RPGs to hit several military vehicles, killing three troops. In another riot in Sidon, between 1 and 3 March 1975, at least 11 civilians were killed and more than 90 wounded when the army opened fire at protesters.[36]

When the prime minister ordered an immediate withdrawal of the army from Sidon, the Christians reacted by days-long demonstrations in support of the armed forces. It was in this tense atmosphere that the spark for the civil war was provided on 13 April 1975: around 1100hrs, as Pierre Gemayel was exiting a church in Ain ar-Remmaneh, a Christian-populated neighbourhood of east Beirut, a Lebanese member of the DFLP sprayed the party with gunfire while passing by. A few minutes later, passengers of two other cars fired shots at the same party, killing three civilians and Gemayel's bodyguard.[37]

From the standpoint of the Lebanese Christians, the situation was 'crystal clear': two hours later, they ambushed a bus transporting a group of Palestinians passing through Ain ar-Remmaneh on its way to the camp of Tel az-Zaatar: 27 on board, including several women and children, were killed in a hail of fire. Within hours, a conflict pitting the Christian militias on one side and Lebanese leftists and Palestinian militias on the other side exploded into an all-out war. Over the following four days, most of the fighting concentrated on areas between Christian-populated districts and Palestinian camps or Muslim-populated areas like Dekwaneh and Tel az-Zaatar, Ain ar-Remmaneh, Chiyah, Haret Hreik, Mreijeh, Burj el-Barajneh, Karantina, Maslakh, and Ashrafiyeh. Further clashes erupted in northern Lebanon, between Tripoli and Zgharta. In the Shuf, the fedayeen from the Barja region attacked Christian villages of Ain al-



The longer the war in Lebanon raged, the better equipped the PLO and diverse allied militias became. Amongst others, the Morabitoun began acquiring Soviet-made ZSU-23-4 Shilka self-propelled anti-aircraft guns, two of which are visible in this photograph (together with one of the group's Land Rovers). (Albert Grandolini Collection)



Widespread atrocities against the poorly-protected Shi'a population of Lebanon led to the emergence of its first armed militia. Colloquially known as the Amal, this grew slowly at first, but by late 1975 already operated several M113s captured from the Lebanese armed forces. (Albert Grandolini)

Assad and Marj Barja, forcing most of the local population towards Christian-populated east Beirut. Over 300 people were killed and 1,500 buildings destroyed before the Arab League mediated a cease-fire, on 16 April 1975.[38]

Renewed clashes between the PLO and the Phalange erupted in mid-May, spreading from Tel az-Zaatar as the Palestinians received support from Shi'a Lebanese. On 30 May 1975 – also known as Black Thursday – a Palestinian was assassinated in downtown Beirut, after which between 30 and 50 Christian civilians were summarily executed in west Beirut. Roadblocks were meanwhile erected all over the city, marking areas under the control of diverse parties, while sectarian-based abductions, mutilations and executions spread like wildfire. The worst was only to follow: between 24 and 30 June, high-intensity fighting erupted in several parts of Beirut, repeatedly resulting in residential buildings being subjected to mortar fire that killed dozens. By 30 June, fighting spread further to the north, where the Sunnis of Tripoli fought the Maronites of Zgharta, in Zahleh in the Beqa'a Valley and in the Shuf.[39]

A cease-fire announced the same day with help of Syrian mediation was to result in dismantlement of barricades and the withdrawal of heavy weapons. However, sporadic fighting continued – amongst others also because of continuous Israeli air strikes against the PLO's bases, like on 13 July 1975, when one of the F-4E Phantoms involved was damaged by ground fire over Lebanon – eventually provoking a new round of clashes lasting from 28 August until 2 December 1975. The initial centrepiece was the commercial hub of Zahleh, a predominantly Christian town on the Beirut-Damascus highway, which came under attack of gunmen from neighbouring villages supported by the Saiqa. As the Saiqa commandos were joined by the local Shi'a, by the time this phase of the fighting was over, most Christians were displaced from the Beqa'a Valley. Meanwhile, a wave of violence hit Tripoli after a Christian from Zgharta hijacked a bus and executed 12 civilians on 7 September 1975: in retaliation, stores, businesses and buildings owned by Christians in Tripoli were blown up. The Phalange retaliated ten days later by looting and burning most of the souq in Tripoli: subsequent artillery bombardment collapsed a hotel killing dozens, in retaliation for which the PFLP assaulted the Christian village of Tel Abbas on 9 October, killing at least 15. On top of this, the IDF/AF deployed no fewer than 32 A-4s to bomb the PLO-controlled camps outside Nar el-Bard, on 2 December, killing dozens.[40]

On 6 December, in retaliation for the murder of four young Christians, the Phalange encircled the port district of east Beirut before raiding this part of the city, killing and abducting unarmed Lebanese Muslims and Palestinians as they went: between 56 and 70 were summarily executed, while the fate of up to 300 remains unknown. With this, it became obvious that the Christian militias were aiming to displace civilians and homogenise the population of areas under their control. However, while they enjoyed military superiority early on, towards the end of 1975 the balance slipped in favour of the coalition of the PLO and leftist Muslim militias. Gradually, the latter brought nearly three quarters of Lebanon under their control. This is why the year 1976 was dominated by sieges of isolated enclaves, like the Tel az-Zaatar and Jisr al-Basha refugee camps full of Palestinian civilians. In turn, the PLO and their Lebanese allies laid siege to the Christian towns of Damour and Jiyeh. Assaulted by the Fatah, DFLP, PFLP, Saiqa, Mourabitoun and a few other militias, both fell on 21 January 1976: the Lebanese Army managed to evacuate about 6,000 to the nearby town of Saadiyat over the last few days, while others were flown out by helicopters of the FAL. However, the militias then assaulted the remaining population, burning, looting and summarily executing as they went: between 150 and 500 civilians were killed, while 35,000 survivors were ethnically cleansed. The PFLP not only took over, but subsequently converted Damour into its major base and a fortress.[41]

The massacre in Damour demoralized the Christians, even more so because meanwhile it was obvious that their enemies were gaining the upper hand. Emboldened, Arafat and other Palestinian leaders came to the conclusion that there was a chance of achieving their own nation state: even if they were unlikely to establish themselves in control of all of Lebanon, they could at least completely destroy the central government. Of course, such ideas were disliked by all too many – including not only Israel and the Western powers, but also all the dominant Arab statesmen, foremost Hafez al-Assad. For the later, a Lebanon under the control of the PLO would mean that the weak and unpopular Christian government in Beirut would have been replaced by an independent Palestinian government that enjoyed the financial and popular support of the Arab world. Damascus thus launched attempts to broker a truce between the two major parties and deployed units of the PLA inside Lebanon to act as buffers.[42]

CHAPTER 5

SYRIA, NOTHING BUT TROUBLE

If the situation in Lebanon was already hopeless as of 1973 and then spiralled out of control in 1975, that in Syria was spiralling out of control too – with direct consequences for Lebanon. Syria was completing its third year of rapid economic growth when it initiated the October 1973 War with Israel. However, during that conflict the IDF/AF launched a concentrated campaign against industrial facilities in Syria. By targeting the country's only two refineries in Homs, and its power supply network, and then all the major bridges, railroads, and communication facilities it caused massive damage, in turn causing a massive downturn in the Syrian economy. The adverse effects were more than offset by the heavy inflow of Arab financial aid: they enabled a relatively quick restoration of trade and industrial activities. However, the electrical power grid was not back to its pre-war capability even as of 1975; the transhipment of Iraqi oil was slowed down by the damage to the oil storage facilities at the port of Tartous; while – due to Israel's refusal of even minimal concessions during post-war negotiations – Damascus not only continued importing large amounts of arms, but also continued waging a war of attrition through the spring of 1974, which in turn forced the government to spend at least 23% of GDP for defence purposes. However, the actual reason why the financial support from abroad did not help alleviate the problem was the pervasive corruption of the Assad regime. A combination of inefficiency, mismanagement and favouritism within the regime, chronic socio-economic problems, and the costly war of October 1973 all resulted in a major economic crisis. Eventually, the Syrian economy had such deep problems that an estimated 400,000 of its citizens sought jobs in Lebanon – where their presence further increased the already massive unemployment and economic problems.[1]

Then, in April 1976, as the Christians in Lebanon were on the brink of another catastrophic defeat, President Frangieh officially requested Syrian military intervention in Lebanon. What happened as a result of this request, and especially the chronological order of the related affairs subsequently became a matter of fierce controversy, especially so between Israel – which insisted that the actions of Damascus represented an act of aggression and resulted in an illegal occupation of Lebanon – and Syria, which insisted that its actions were legal.[2]



The crucial characters in Syria of the 1970s were top ranking Alawite officers, such as Major-General Muhammad al-Khuli, head of the Air Force Intelligence. This was (and remains) the – by far – most powerful (and most notorious) security agency in the country: despite its designation, ever since 1970 its almost exclusive purpose has been securing the survival of Hafez al-Assad's regime. (CIA)

ALAWISATION OF THE MILITARY

The Syrian Arab Army's onslaught on the Golan Heights in October 1973 was not only unsuccessful, but also resulted in the force losing nearly all of its MBTs and most of its APCs and IFVs. While most of the army's mechanised formations were rebuilt with the help of deliveries from the Soviet Union, Czechoslovakia, Yugoslavia and a few other countries in Eastern Europe during and immediately after the conflict, the work on their consolidation and further expansion required additional arms. Correspondingly, in September 1975 Hafez al-Assad visited Prague to place an order for 500 T-55 MBTs, 500 BMP-1 IFVs, 100 VT-55 armoured recovery vehicles, 20 JVBT-55KS armoured crane vehicles, 50 mobile workshops for the repair of tanks, 40 Aero L-39 jet trainers, 500 T-148 trucks, 35 AD-160 truck-mounted cranes, and 500 tonnes of TNT. Prague granted permission for this order, thus making Syria the third biggest export customer of Czechoslovak arms by 1977.[3]

Perhaps surprisingly, a significant portion of such huge arms acquisitions was never provided directly to the Syrian Arab Army, but to a number of units with entirely different purpose. Ever since the time he served as commander of the Dmeyr AB, in 1965, Hafez al-Assad maintained what was de-facto his private praetorian guard. Designated 'Defence Companies' and commanded by his brother Rifa'at, what was originally a single unit equipped with small-arms and light anti-aircraft artillery protecting just one base eventually grew into a complex of three division-sized units with multiple purposes: to defend Hafez al-Assad against armed opposition, to protect the privileged status of the Alawite minority, and to act as a last defence of Damascus against threats from abroad. During the 1970s, such units were expanded into an equivalent of five divisions. In addition to the Rifa'at-commanded Defence Companies (now 15,000-strong and equipped like a regular armoured division), in 1976 the existing Presidential Guard Brigade was expanded into the 10,000-strong Republican Guard Division. Commanded by Hafez al-Assad's maternal cousin Adnan Makhlouf, this was completely equipped with T-62s and BMP-1s. The October 1973 War taught Assad and his military commanders to place greater emphasis upon



After the October 1973 War, infantry units of the Syrian Arab Army were re-equipped with a large-scale acquisition of Soviet-made BMP-1 infantry fighting vehicles. This photograph was taken during related training in the Homs area, and shows troops emerging from the rear compartment of a BMP-1. Barely noticeable is the 'camouflage pattern' applied on the vehicle: this consisted of wide 'strips' of sand colour applied over its original 'green overall'. (Tom Cooper Collection)

the establishment and training of diverse units of 'special forces' character. The first such asset – the 1st Parachute Battalion – was established in 1958: by 1973, this was expanded into a division-sized Special Forces Command. By 1976, this force (re-organised as the 15th Special Forces Division in the 1980s) included about 15,000 troops organised into seven regiments, three of which (41st, 45th and 54th) were equipped with BMP-1s. The balance of Syrian special forces (rather resembling Rangers of the US Army or elite light infantry in their training and capabilities) was meanwhile re-organised into the 6,000-strong 14th Special Forces Division. Major-General Ali Haydar subsequently took over the command of the 3rd Armoured Division: nominally the crack armoured formation that acted as the strategic reserve of the SyAA, this was mauled during the October 1973 War but then completely rebuilt with the help of Cuban advisors and expanded into a 15,000-strong force equipped with T-62 MBTs and BMP-1s.[4]

To say that these 'elite' units enjoyed a privileged status and received the best troops and equipment, would be an oversimplification: paying close attention to their loyalty, Hafez al-Assad took immense care to staff them with his most trusted officers – almost exclusively Alawites, and only rarely members of other minorities. Pursued not only to safeguard Assad's rule from all sorts of internal opposition, but also against diverse rivals within the Alawite community, the politics of 'Alawisation' of the Syrian military was thus further intensified during the 1970s: by 1976, the Alawite significantly outnumbered all other sects and ethno-religious groups in the Syrian officer corps, and especially in senior intelligence positions. They commanded not only most of the army's divisions, but all of the elite units, the Air Force- and Military intelligence services. The few Sunnis left in top positions were people renowned for their demonstrated loyalty and had worked closely with Assad since at least 1970, like Minister of Defence Mustafa Tlas, and the Chief-of-Staff Army, Shihabi – neither of whom had a real power base.[5]

The net result was that the 'best' units of the Syrian ground forces were foremost staffed by ranks *closest and most loyal* to Assad, and then those having the best training: this did not mean that they were actually commanded by the brightest and most skilled Syrian officers. The promotion 'by loyalty over merit' was to become a reason for not only major trouble in Syria of the late 1970s, but – at least indirectly – also for its defeat in Lebanon in 1982.[6]

REBUILT BUT NOT MODERNIZED

The SyAAF and the SyAADF underwent a similar process. During and immediately after the October 1973 War, the losses of the air force were replaced by Moscow through the sale of up to 40 MiG-21MFs and about 50 MiG-17s (original variant, lacking afterburner), while Czechoslovakia donated 12 MiG-21F-13s, Hungary sold 12 MiG-21F-13s, and Poland another 7 MiG-21F-13s.[7]

Obviously, this was barely enough to replace war-time losses. Indeed, on insistence from Damascus, in April 1974 Moscow delivered 16 MiG-23MS' and 4 MiG-23UBs. These were followed by the second batch of 20 MiG-23MS' (ASCC/NATO-codename 'Flogger-B') and MiG-23UBs conversion trainers (ASCC/NATO-codename 'Flogger-C') in May of the same year, and then by at least 13 MiG-23BNs (ASCC/NATO-codename 'Flogger-H'). Regardless their variant, all the aircraft of this type were concentrated within the newly-established 17th Fighter-Bomber Brigade, commanded by Lieutenant-Colonel Hicham Karmi.[8] However, while much praised by the Soviets – and thus hotly anticipated by the Syrians – these aircraft not only arrived accompanied by incomplete and poorly prepared training manuals and technical documentation, but were also marred by their poor manufacturing quality and technical unreliability. Combined with the pride and overconfidence of Syrian pilots, and their usual mistrust of the Soviet advisors, this contributed to the SyAAF losing no fewer than four different MiG-23s in accidents within 15 days of the start of their operations. By the end of 1974, up to 13 MiG-23s had been written off, including the example that crashed and killed Major Hassan Saleh Abboud, a highly-decorated pilot of the October 1973 War. Up to four Soviet advisors involved may have been killed or injured in MiG-23-related accidents, too. Syrian sources indicate that it was only after the 15th accident, sometime in 1975, that the crucial reason for most of the issues with the type was found and the problem sorted out. Under such conditions, the miscellany of MiG-21F-13s, MiG-21FL/PFMs and MiG-21M/MFs continued to form the backbone of the SyAAF, regardless of all being now obsolete.[9]

It thus fell upon the SyAADF to carry the brunt of responsibility for air defence. Although Soviet advisors helped work up additional units through 1974, due to losses during October 1973 this service

Table 4: Deliveries of Soviet SA-2 and SA-3 SAM-Systems to Syria, 1971-1976

Type	ASCC/NATO-codename	Battalions	Missiles
SA-75MK Dvina, S-75K Dvina-AK & S-75 Desna	SA-2A/B Guideline	8	344 V-750
S-75M Volga	SA-2A Guideline	7	614 V-755
S-75M/SA-75M Volkhov/Volkhov-M	SA-2A/C Guideline	8	184 V-759
S-125M/M1A Pechora/Neva	SA-3 Goa	15	622 V-601



The Soviets sold MiG-23MS interceptors to the Syrians without revealing anything about their extremely problematic developmental history, and without providing them with the necessary technical- and training-related documentation. The result was extensive problems with introducing the type to service, as described in the sister-volume 'MiG-23 Flogger in the Middle East'. This photograph shows a group of pilots in front of a row of brand new MiG-23MS' (in the foreground is the example with serial number 1623) of No. 67 Squadron at as-Se'en AB, in 1975. (R. S. Collection)



A 5P71 launcher with two V-601P missiles of an S-125M Pechora (SA-3 Goa) SAM-site of the Syrian Arab Air Defence Force. (Tom Cooper Collection)

remained very much the same it was during the October 1973 War. It was still centred on six P-14 and P-14F early warning radars and boasted about 40 battalions equipped with SAM-systems: the majority of these of the SA-2 and SA-3 types (those delivered to Syria by 1976 are listed in Table 4), while the balance consisted of SA-6 systems. The only major reinforcement acquired in 1973-1976 consisted of two additional Akkord-75/125A, and 4 Sneg ATMS': integration with the early warning radars and manned interceptors was still managed by the same two AZURK-1ME ATMS' as in 1973.[10]

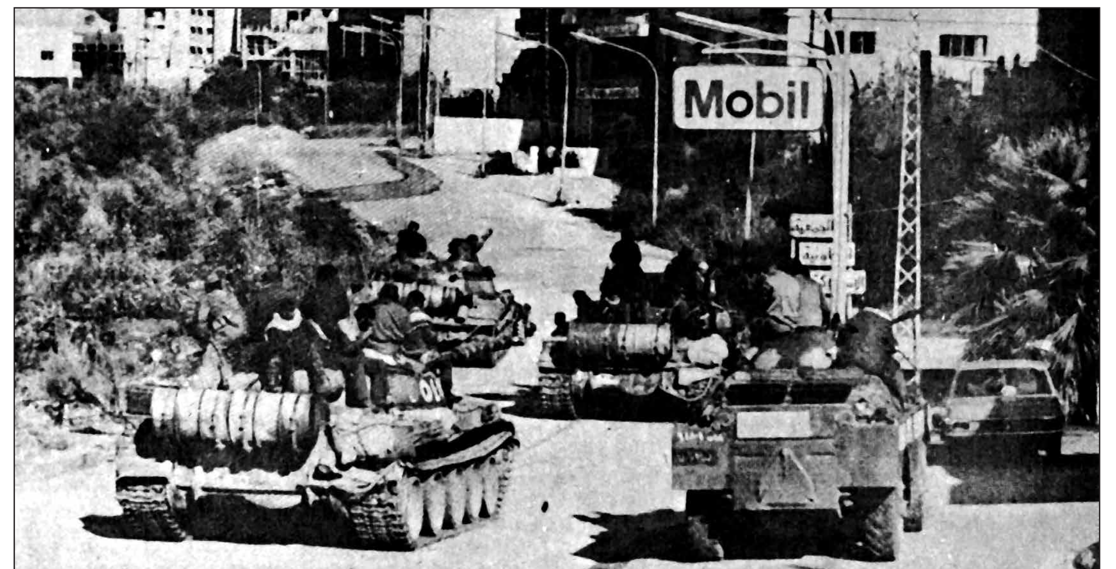
At least as important was the geo-strategic situation in which the Syrians found themselves due to the loss of the June 1967 War with Israel. During that conflict, Israel established itself in possession of dominating peaks on the Golan Heights, in south-western Syria. These were promptly exploited for construction of numerous early warning radar stations, and COMINT/ELINT/SIGINT-stations, all of which provided an excellent insight into Syrian airspace as far as the T-4 AB (also known as 'Tiyas'), in central Syria, nearly 300km (161nm) from the Golan Heights. The work of the SyAADF's IADS was strongly disrupted by the mountain chains of Lebanon and the very same peaks on the Golan Heights atop of which the Israelis had constructed their early warning stations.

SYRIAN MILITARY INTERVENTION IN LEBANON

The initial Syrian reaction to the outbreak of civil war in Lebanon was restrained and concentrated on mediating between the conflicting parties. However, in January 1976, the Phalange launched an offensive aimed at expelling Muslim and other elements from the 'Christian homeland'. Fearing a Lebanon partitioned along sectarian lines, Hafez al-Assad formed a nine-member cabinet including the top-ranking representatives of the army, air force and intelligence services, the Saiqa, his prime minister and foreign minister, and two top representatives of the Ba'ath Party, the task of which was to deal with the developments in Lebanon. The first action of that cabinet was to deploy the PLA to fight on the side of the combined Muslim and Palestinian forces. However, this intervention quickly tilted the balance against the Christians: acting against Assad's intentions, the Muslims and the



Since 1973, the SyAADF had constructed a large number of heavily fortified air defence installations around Damascus. This photograph shows the SA-2 site protecting Damascus International Airport. Connected by a network of cables used for communications and data-transfer, all such facilities were tightly integrated into the same IADS. (Photo by Tom Cooper)



A platoon of T-62s and a BRDM-2 armoured reconnaissance car of the 3rd Armoured Division of the Syrian Arab Army entering Zahle in 1976. The cramped interior of this tank resulted in their crews attaching all of their belongings and equipment to the outsides of their vehicles. (Albert Grandolini Collection)



The northern prong of the Syrian intervention in Lebanon of June 1976 was led by T-55 MBTs of the 85th Independent Brigade, one of which (turret number 288) is visible in this photograph. (R. S. Collection)

Palestinians gained the initiative and began to demand the total subjugation of the Maronites. When his enemies besieged two predominantly Christian-populated towns, Frangieh requested help from Damascus.[11]

Assad took time to consider Frangieh's request for help: although the Syrian Navy was already running a de-facto blockade of the Lebanese ports north of Beirut, as of early 1976, Damascus was refusing to entertain the possibility of a military solution to the fighting in Lebanon. Ultimately, the decision may have been heavily influenced by the fact that the war was converting into an inter-sectarian issue, that Frangieh was replaced by a new politician of Assad's choice, Elias Sarkis, on 8 May 1976, but also that the port of Beirut still played a dominant position in the foreign commerce of Damascus – and that the local banks were flush with money.[12]

Assad announced his decision to deploy the Syrian armed forces into Lebanon on 31 May 1976. The SyAA moved quickly: the first 4,000 troops of the 3rd Armoured Division crossed the border on 1 June, the 85th Independent Brigade (equipped with T-55s and BTR-152s) followed on the next day, while the strongman in Damascus proudly announced in public: 'Throughout history, Syria and Lebanon have always been united. We have a common past. We have a common future and we will have a common destiny.'[13]

One could agree or disagree with this conclusion, file it under 'typical illusions about a Greater Syria', as so often done in Israel and the West; but, one cannot deny that Assad's words essentially predicted the future of both Lebanon and Syria.

While knowing they were facing up to 20,000 Palestinian and

Lebanese combatants, the Syrians were aware that these were only lightly armed. On the other hand, knowing *they* could count on the support of up to 20,000 well-armed Phalangists, the Syrians expected their opposition to fold and flee. Indeed, the advance of their 85th Independent Brigade into northern Lebanon progressed quickly: the force lifted the siege of Qubiat and Anarqiat before pushing on to Tripoli. The 3rd Armoured Division secured the Beka'a Valley without much trouble before Major-General Ali Haydar ordered one of his armoured brigades to continue towards Sidon, while leading his remaining units on Beirut. However, knowing that should Assad establish himself in control of Lebanon the PLO would no longer be capable of independent action, Arafat meanwhile ordered the fedayeen and their allies to resist the intervention. Thus, as the Syrians continued their advance along the Beirut-Damascus highway, they ran into a series of roadblocks and ambushes. The drive on Sidon also ran into a series of ambushes outside the town while the 85th Brigade failed to take Tripoli. In other words: after losing about 30 T-62s and a similar number of BMP-1s and BTR-152s, the Syrians were stopped cold.[14]



The LAA – reinforced in the meantime not only by defections from the Lebanese armed forces, but also from those of Syria, and bolstered through the acquisition of heavy arms via the PLO – proved one of the major obstacles for the Syrians during their advance into Lebanon in June 1976. This photograph shows a Soviet-made D-30 122mm howitzer of the LAA in action. (Albert Grandolini Collection)

SOVIET ARMS EMBARGO

Many more problems were meanwhile in the making from an entirely unexpected corner. On 1 June 1976, a message from the General Secretary of the Soviet Communist Party – and the strongman in Moscow – Leonid Brezhnev reached the Presidential Palace in Damascus, stating (amongst other points):

> The Soviet Union is concerned by the position that Syria has taken in Lebanon. We, the leaders of the Soviet people, insist that the Syrian leadership immediately put an end to all military operations against the Palestine Liberation Movement. In Lebanon, all fighting must be stopped without delay. We demand an unconditional ceasefire. The best way to ensure that it is respected is when you withdraw your troops from Lebanon. If this withdrawal does not take place, the imperialists and their Arab allies will come closer to their goal of bringing the Progressive Movements of Arabia under their control.[15]

Formulated without any of the usual diplomatic catchwords, the message caused a shock in Damascus: it was a clear order that had to be taken seriously by Assad. Although financially supported by countries like Saudi Arabia, Syria was isolated on the international scene and had no other ally but the USSR. Therefore, while Assad would actually have preferred an alliance with one of the Western powers – and indeed to start importing Western arms and training methods – he could do little to break away from the Soviet Union. Moreover, the constant threat of another war with Israel – that was meanwhile receiving immense amounts of US arms and financial support (see next chapter for details) – resulted in a situation where the Syrians could not afford the expensive and time-consuming process of transition to Western weapon systems. Damascus could never be certain of obtaining full and long-term Western military support of the kind Israel was receiving. Therefore, Syria was heavily dependent on the Soviets.[16]

Certainly enough, the strongman in Damascus had to consider the growing pressure from much of the Arab public – which demanded a Syrian military intervention – and his earlier experiences of military confrontations with Israel: Hafez al-Assad was determined never to be called a 'wimp' again. Moreover, the opportunity to position his armed forces inside Lebanon and thus block any possible Israeli threat to the exposed south-western flank of Syria was a welcome one. Finally, the decades old dream of re-uniting Lebanon and Syria appeared to be within reach. In an attempt to buy time, Assad feigned a withdrawal of his forces: the 3rd Armoured Division was temporarily withdrawn into the hills of eastern Lebanon. At the same time, its lonesome armoured brigade was reinforced by a full commando regiment and artillery, and re-launched its attack on Sidon. The commandos managed to advance into the town only to find themselves entrapped: after attempts to bring in supplies and take out the wounded by helicopters failed, the Syrians had to deploy their armour again to extract the commandos. The operation ended with a partial success, but all of the involved units were mauled. Meanwhile, Assad arranged for a meeting of foreign ministers of the Arab League on 9 June 1976. This ended with the call for a cease-fire, a day later, and the official invitation of the Arab League to deploy its forces in Lebanon. Nothing of this helped: on the contrary, Moscow reacted not only with a disagreement, but with an outright suspension of all the arms deliveries to Damascus. For all practical purposes, in June 1976 the USSR imposed an arms embargo upon Syria.[17]



The leader of the Syrian Muslim Brotherhood, Adnan Sa'ad ad-Din, who was living in exile throughout the insurgency of the late 1970s. (CIA)

INSURGENCY IN SYRIA

The Soviet decision could not have hit home at a worse moment for Assad, because at the same time all the weaknesses of his politics, his methods of controlling the Syrian economy, society and armed forces were fully exposed through widespread internal unrest. First, a large number of PLA officers, and even several officers of the SyAA, defected to join Khatib's Lebanon Arab Army. Furthermore, on 14 June 1976, Lieutenant Mahmoud Musleh Yasin defected to Iraq flying one of the brand-new MiG-23MS'. Two days later, Captain Ahmed Abdul Qadir at-Tarmanini refused the order to bomb a Palestinian refugee camp outside the village of Tel az-Zaatar, in Lebanon: instead, he also flew his MiG-21 to Iraq. The investigation of both cases quickly drew clear conclusions: both were naturalised Palestinians, people who joined the Syrian armed forces to fight Israel, not to combat the PLO.[18]

Much worse was already in the making – and then by a party renowned as a 'troublemaker' in Damascus: the Muslim Brotherhood (MB). Formed in 1942, this movement was politically active in the Lebanon and Syria of the 1950s, and even won a few seats in the Damascene Parliament and participated in civilian governments. However, its activity was fiercely suppressed by the Ba'ath Party as soon as the latter established itself in power, forcing the leaders of the MB to hide – and, gradually, extremise – even more so after major riots in Aleppo, Homs and Hamah led by their activists being brutally quelled by security forces, in February-July 1973. The standing of the MB in Syria improved significantly after the Melkhart Agreement: the organisation established ties to the PLO, and began receiving arms, ammunition and training. This is how it became possible that Marwan Hadeed, one of three leaders of the Syrian MB, began organising the 'Fighting Vanguard' (*at-Tali'a al-Muqatila*) – the first armed group. This was trained at Fatah's camps, before being deployed into Syria to target government officials and military officers.[19]

Underrepresentation of the locals in Damascus, the decline of the traditional cotton industry, and the death of one of the MB leaders in a government prison resulted in renewed unrest in Hama, on 8 February 1976, which quickly spread to Homs and then Aleppo, before becoming an armed uprising supported by allies of Assad's former rival, General Salah Jadid, and members of the Kurdish Democratic Party. Hafez al-Assad reacted by deploying Rifa'at's Defence Companies and the 47th Armoured Brigade (headquartered in Hama) of the 3rd Armoured Division, but their military coercion and intimidation campaign misfired. A wave of bombings and assassinations swept through Syria's north-central cities during the summer, culminating in the bombing of a pipeline near Homs, and a rocket attack on the intelligence headquarters in Hamah, in August 1976.[20]

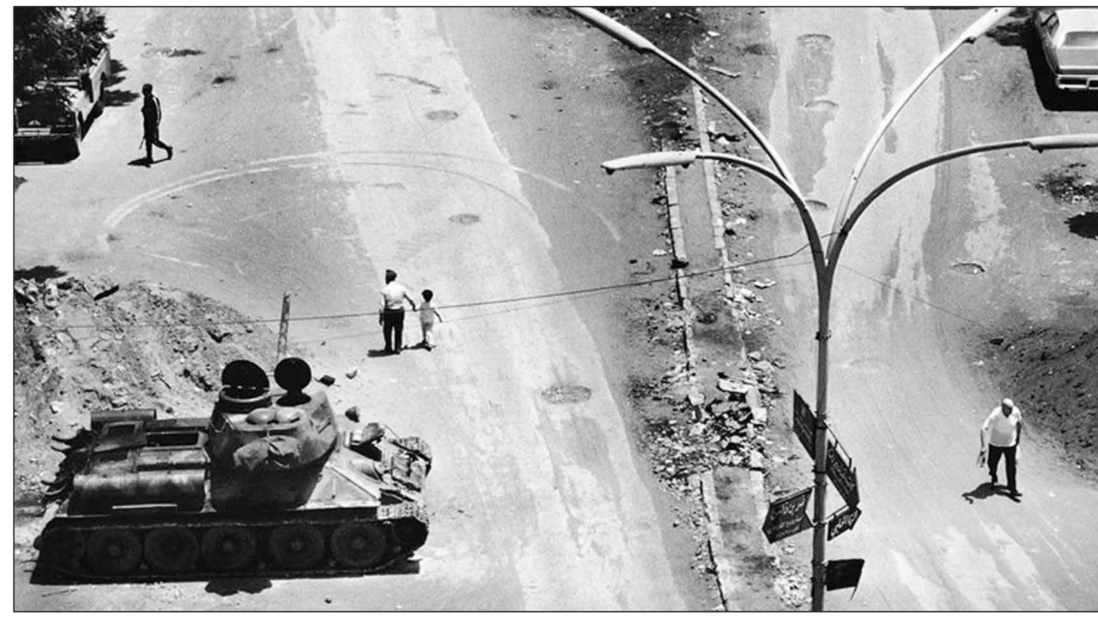
Of course, when the 3rd Armoured Division was re-deployed to Lebanon, the situation only worsened. On 26 April 1976, Radio Cairo reported that a group of non-Alawite officers that were members of the Ba'ath Party had attempted a military coup against Hafez al-Assad, and that all were summarily executed. True or not, such reports indicated the shaky position of the Assad regime: through the summer of 1976, Assad was not only forced to bolster the 3rd Armoured Division in Lebanon, but also to deploy all of the Defence Companies to secure the area between Homs and Aleppo. At that point in time, even Baghdad became involved in Syria: on 26 September, four gunmen of the ANO entered the Hotel Semiramis in Damascus and took all guests and employees hostage. Although the hijackers were quickly overrun by the security services (one was killed and the others arrested, only to be publicly hanged on the next day), the writing was on the wall: over the following days, weeks and then months, the MB and the ANO intensified their campaigns of assassination. By the end of 1976, these resulted in the deaths of such civilian officials as the rectors of the Universities of Aleppo and Damascus, the President of the Syrian-Soviet Society, and the President of the Medical Council, but also military officers like the Commander of the 115th Missile Brigade – which was equipped with newly-delivered R-17E ballistic missiles (ASCC/NATO-codename SS-1c Scud-B) – Brigadier-General Abdel Hamid Razzuq, and the commander of the Hama garrison, Major-General Ali Haydar. Most of those assassinated were Alawites, and a few belonged to the circle of Assad's closest associates.[21]

While blaming Baghdad for running a clandestine campaign against the Syrian government, Assad eventually found no other solution but to purge some of his security services in an attempt to improve their functioning. Nothing helped: assassinations continued



A column of the Syrian Arab Army, led by a T-54/55 MBT with a mine-clearing device, seen while underway along one of many meandering roads of central Lebanon in 1976. (R. S. Collection)

and then ever more officers of the armed services began distancing themselves from him. Amid the growing crisis in Syria, on 12 August 1976, the PLO's resistance in Tel az-Zaatar refugee camp in eastern Beirut, besieged by Maronites since January, collapsed. In addition to over 1,000 Palestinians killed during the siege – most of them children – the Christian militiamen then massacred between 1,000 and 1,500 defenceless Palestinian civilians. With a total number of victims at between 2,200 and 4,280, this was the worst massacre in the war.[22]



By 1976, the PLO also began acquiring heavy equipment for its units. This Soviet-made T-34 operated by the Palestinians was photographed while protecting one of the countless checkpoints in Beirut and its suburbs. (Albert Grandolini Collection)

SEPTEMBER 1976 OFFENSIVE

Accused by the Arab World of 'betraying the Muslims', and understanding any concessions as a sign of weakness, at this point in time Hafez al-Assad decided to demonstrate his power with a new offensive in Lebanon. On 28 September 1976, one of Major-General Haydar's brigades advanced to link-up with Bashir Gemayel's forces at Ra'as al-Matan, another established contact with the Christians led by Amin Gemayel, at Qarnil, while a third unit – consisting of BMP-1-mounted commandos – advanced along the Beirut-Damascus highway. Although taken by surprise and primarily consisting of combatants trained to use only Kalashnikov assault rifles and RPG-7s, the Lebanese Arab Army and the PLO put up fierce resistance and caused heavy casualties, before withdrawing to evade the superior Syrian firepower. Eventually, the Syrians broke through and – together with the Phalange – secured most of the highway and its branch up to the Muslim stronghold of R'as al-Matan. After regrouping and re-supplying, on 12 October, the Syrians expanded their offensive by launching a combined-arms operation towards Beirut and Sidon at the same time. Supported by helicopters, artillery, and commandos, T-62s of the 3rd Armoured Division drove down the Beirut-Damascus highway before attempting to outflank heavily fortified Bhamdoun. However, reinforced by the Mourabiton and the PLO, Khatib's LAA inflicted heavy losses: indeed, by 17 October, Haydar's advance was stopped in this area, while the two northern prongs of his attack – mostly consisting of Syrian infantry and commandos combined with Phalange – were slowed down to a crawl.[23]

The push on Sidon developed only slightly better: although supported by a combination of air strikes, artillery barrages, armour and infantry attacks, the 3rd Division was slow to follow up, in turn regularly leaving the PLO, the PFLP and allied forces plenty of time to recover from the initial shock, re-occupy their positions and set up new ambushes and roadblocks. Much firepower was thus wasted, while the Syrians continued suffering heavy losses. Only once they reinforced at least two of their columns with additional commandos did their northern column break through to reach the mouth of the Awali River, late on 15 October 1976.[24]

RIYADH ACCORD

With Beirut and Sidon within range of 3rd Armoured Division's artillery – indeed, the Syrians heavily shelled Sidon for nearly a week – and the Palestinian and Muslim forces showing first signs of exhaustion, Damascus was satisfied with the results of this offensive. Correspondingly, Assad agreed to another summit of the Arab League in Riyadh: on 21 October, this announced a new ceasefire and the creation of the Arab Deterrent Force (ADF). Officially placed under President Sarki's command, the ADF was made up of 30,000 troops, primarily from the SyAA (25,000), but also included contingents from Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates, Sudan, Libya, North and South Yemen. Its task was not only to ensure that the ceasefire held, or to preserve Lebanon's sovereignty, but also to guarantee the application of the 1969 Cairo Accord: in other words, it was quite contradictory.[25]

The ceasefire came into effect on 15 November 1976 in Beirut, and on 21 November in Sidon and Tripoli, officially ending the first, two-year-long phase of the Lebanese Civil War. By that time, about 800,000 Lebanese had gone into exile, while at least 150,000 Christians and 100,000 Muslims became internally displaced persons (IDPs). Having the task of ensuring that the ceasefire held, preserving Lebanese sovereignty, and guaranteeing the application of the Cairo Accord, the ADF deployed heavily in west Beirut, the Beqa'a Valley, Tripoli, Sidon, and the Shuf, securing all important installations in the process. Eventually, the ADF was everywhere except south of the line connecting Siddon with Jebel Sheikh. This, so-called 'Red Line' was, reportedly, the result of a Washington-mediated indirect agreement according to which Syrian troops were supposed not to deploy south of that line, nor to use their air force against ground targets in Lebanon. Actually, there is no evidence that Syria ever accepted such terms.[26]

SHTURA AGREEMENT

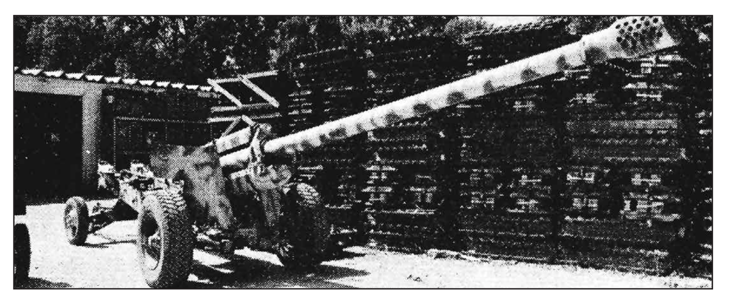
Certainly enough, the ADF was preoccupied with other issues: its troops collected thousands of light arms, hundreds of heavy weapons, and took care to restore commercial activity. The civil war stopped. Now it was up to the Syrians to supervise the second stage of the Riyadh Accord: the implementation of the Cairo Agreement of 1969 within three months. Ironically, the biggest hurdle in

this process proved to be the Palestinians, who repeatedly failed to observe the limitations the agreement placed upon them, thus creating difficulties for the Syrians – who were obliged to get the PLO to fulfil its obligations without the use of force. Months-long negotiations eventually resulted in the Shtura Agreement of July 1977. Strongly influenced by the emergence of a new government in Israel led by Prime Minister Menachem Begin – which the Syrians saw as radical and aggressive, and expected to attempt drawing them into a new war via the Lebanese crisis, and which the PLO expected to invade southern Lebanon – this treaty regulated responsibilities between the two new allies. According to it, the Palestinians were to hand over their heavy weapons to the ADF and evacuate their bases and offices outside the refugee camps. They were supposed to wear no uniforms or carry weapons while moving around Lebanon. In turn, the Syrian forces were responsible for the defence of the refugee camps. The responsibility for law and order inside the camps was entrusted to the Palestinian military police, which was to work in coordination with the Lebanese gendarmerie, until new Lebanese armed forces could be created to replace the latter. Moreover, during the second stage of implementation of the Shtura Agreement, the Palestinians were to stop fighting the Christian militias in southern Lebanon, to withdraw from the area along the Israeli border into their camps, and to open all major roads for traffic, while the Lebanese government was granted the right to deploy a military force in the south, deploy this along the border, and secure local Christian enclaves. While effectively implemented in most of Lebanon during the summer of 1977, the Shtura Agreement was never carried out in southern Lebanon: the Palestinians refused to withdraw, and – attempting to avoid a clash with Israel – the ADF lacked the necessary mandate and freedom of movement in that part of the country.[27]

DEMISE OF THE LAA AND EMERGENCE OF THE SLA

One of the principal reasons for the Palestinian refusal to withdraw from southern Lebanon was their distrust of Syria – and there were many reasons for this. The first was Assad's decision to destroy the LAA, one of the most important Lebanese allies of the PLO, and the resistance of which caused Syrian forces so many problems and frustrations. On 18 January 1977, he invited Khatib and his top commanders to a meeting in Damascus: as soon as they crossed the border to Syria, the commander of the LAA and his aides were all arrested and imprisoned in the notorious Almazza Military Prison. Although subsequently released, they were forced to resign their commissions and abstain from all political and military activity. The Palestinian and Syrian officers of the SyAA that had joined them were all arrested and summarily executed. The LAA was disbanded in February 1978, and some of its elements subsequently re-incorporated into the Lebanese armed forces.[28]

Meanwhile, a new militia appeared in southern Lebanon. Before the Shtura Accords, and in cooperation with Israel, the Lebanese government and Camille Chamoun – leader of the National Liberal Party (NLP) of Lebanon – who was maintaining a 4,000-strong private militia, dispatched Major Sa'ad Haddad to the south with the task of reforming and regrouping the remnants of diverse militias opposed to the PLO and the Syrians. Arriving in southern Lebanon via Israel in 1976, and with Israeli support, Haddad created what was originally known as the 'Border Militia', and eventually became known as the South Lebanon Army (SLA): composed of Christians, but also drafting some Shi'a and Druze, the SLA grew into a reasonably powerful force, organized into two regions (western and eastern), each of which had one infantry brigade consisting of three battalion-sized infantry regiments. The Israelis supplied it with about 50 M50 Sherman and T-54/55 MBTs (most of the later modified to Tyran-standard), a few AMX-13 light tanks and some M3 half-tracks, organized into an armoured regiment. However, the SLA foremost excelled through its powerful 'artillery corps', equipped with British-made 25-Pounders, a few French-made BF-50s, Soviet-made M-46 field guns, and a wide array of anti-aircraft guns.


Soviet-made M-46 130mm field guns were the main artillery piece of the PLO. A few examples (including this one) were captured by the Israelis, who in turn provided them to the SLA. (Albert Grandolini Collection)

In attempt to expand his zone of influence, in January 1977 Haddad, supported by Israeli artillery, took control of Dayr Mimas and Kfar Kila, and in February occupied the town of Khiyam. The Palestinians counterattacked and forced him out of most of his gains. The Israelis and the Christians remained insistent: in September 1977, Haddad's force – supported by Israeli armour – launched another offensive on Khiyam. Predictably, as soon as it recognized direct Israeli involvement, in early November 1977, the PLO reacted with rocket attacks on the town of Nahariya in Israel, and a strong counterattack on the ground. Begin promptly ordered the IDF/AF into a series of air strikes. On 9 November, A-4s and Israeli Aircraft Industries (IAI) Kfir C.2s from No. 101 Squadron and No. 109 Squadron (in the first operational sorties for that type), virtually wiped out the Lebanese hamlet of Azziyeh in the hinterland of Tyre, massacring 65 Lebanese civilians and wounding another 68. A day later, the IDF/AF heavily bombed Nabatiyah and Khiyam, and then the village of Yarin, killing another 100 – and this although the Israeli Chief-of-Staff Mordechai Gur affirmed that the raids were targeting, 'purely terrorist bases', and subsequently-published Israeli accounts pointing out that, '…the number of PLO targets in southern Lebanon was small'.[29]

ASSAD'S MANOEUVRES OF 1977

While the Riyadh Accord brought a respite in Lebanon, and the Shtura Agreement formed a sort of alliance between Syria and the PLO, the situation in Syria continued deteriorating. Finding no other solution, in April 1977 Hafez al-Assad travelled to Moscow accompanied by Mustafa Tlass and a large military delegation. In the course of days-long-meetings with the Soviet leadership, the two parties found a number of compromises and their friendly relationship was re-established. Indeed, in exchange for Syrian agreement to support the Soviet-backed PLO, acceptance of the Soviet statement that Israel had a right to an independent state and secure existence, and agreement to arrange a committee that was to combat the growing corruption of his state authorities – the Soviet leadership granted generous economic aid and promised to significantly bolster the Syrian armed forces. Included in the resulting arms package were deliveries of 20 MiG-21bis, which arrived armed with advanced R-13M (ASCC/NATO-codename 'AA-2d Atoll') and R-60M/MK (ASCC/NATO-codename 'AA-8 Aphid') infra-red homing, short range missiles. More importantly, Moscow promised the delivery of

28-30 MiG-23MF interceptors (ASCC/NATO-codename 'Flogger-B') and 36 MiG-23BN fighter-bombers, about 20 MiG-25PD interceptors (ASCC/NATO-codename 'Foxbat-E'), a handful of MiG-25PU conversion trainers (ASCC/NATO-codename 'Foxbat-C'), and at least 8 MiG-25RB reconnaissance fighters (ASCC/NATO-codename 'Foxbat-B') to the SyAAF. The SyAADF was significantly bolstered through the deliveries of more than 50 additional SA-2, SA-3, and SA-6 SAM-sites (the list of SA-2 and SA-3 SAM-systems delivered in the 1978-1982 period is provided in Table 5). Ironically, most of these purchases were paid for by Saudi Arabia. However, all of the MiG-23BNs were actually financed by Baghdad.[30]



An ex-Israeli M3 half-truck of the SLA, patrolling southern Lebanon. (Photo by Al J Venter)

Table 5: Deliveries of Soviet SA-2 and SA-3 SAM-Systems to Syria, 1977-1982			
Type	**ASCC/NATO-codename**	**Battalions**	**Missiles**
S-75M Volga	SA-2A Guideline	29	988 V-755
S-75M/SA-75M Volkhov/Volkhov-M	SA-2A/C Guideline	6	-
S-125M/M1A Pechora/Neva	SA-3 Goa	25	1,000 V-601

However, the Soviets proved rather reserved when it came to the deliveries of advanced tanks and other ground-based equipment: for unknown reasons, they turned down the Syrian demand for T-72 MBTs, and also for Mil Mi-24 helicopter gunships – which Assad wanted because of earlier Israeli acquisitions of US-made Bell AH-1 Cobra attack helicopters (see next chapter for details) – and this although they had already delivered the latter to Ethiopia. Displeased by the Soviets forcing him into an alliance with the PLO, and concerned by Sadat's preparations to travel to Israel and negotiate peace (an act he considered a 'capitulation') Assad thus entered negotiations with Baghdad for a possible union with Iraq. In turn, the Iraqis suggested to the Syrians that they request an equivalent to the Mi-24s from France. This is how it came to be that during the same year a Syrian delegation visited Paris to place an order for 18 Aerospatiale SA.342 Gazelle attack helicopters equipped with AS.12 anti-tank guided missiles (ATGMs). Furthermore, Damascus placed additional large orders for MBTs and APCs, and entered negotiations for the acquisition of 60 Aero L-39 Albatross training jets, 350 T-55s and more than 700 diverse armoured fighting vehicles in Prague.[31]

Finally, in reaction to Sadat's visit to Israel, in November 1977, Assad managed to secure additional funding from Saudi Arabia, which in turn enabled his government to place another order for SA.342 Gazelles. This time, the variant acquired was armed with 'High-Subsonic Optical Remote-Guided fired from a Tube' (Hautsubsonique Optiquement Téleguidé Tiré d'un Tube, HOT) ATGMs – at the time considered one of the most advanced weapons of this type in world-wide service.

Of course, all of these arms proved no solution to the spreading



A rare photo of a SyAAF SA.342 Gazelle firing an AS.12 ATGM, during training in Syria in 1979 or 1980. (Tom Cooper Collection)

OF FLOGGERS AND FOXBATS

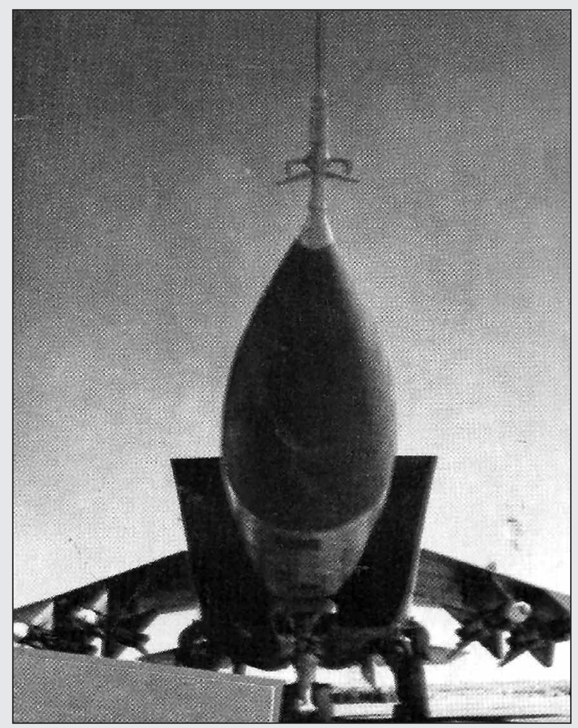
Although the aircraft delivered to Syria were second-hand, overhauled, former MiG-23Ms and MiG-25 of the VVS or the PVO, the Soviet agreement to export MiG-23MFs and MiG-25PDs to Syria was a major break-through: it was the first time ever that the USSR showed readiness to deliver an advanced weapons system de-facto equipped to the same standard as that used by its own military to a customer outside Eastern Europe. The MiG-23MF was essentially the same as the MiG-23M: although designated S-23E, its weapons system was the same as the S-23 on the original model, and its primary armament consisted of the same R-23 MRAAMs operated by the Soviets. These could only be deployed against targets underway at altitudes above 1,000 metres (3,280ft), but had an effective engagement range of between 15km (8nm; for the IR variant, R-23T) and 25 kilometres (13.5nm; for the SARH variant, R-23R, ASCC code AA-7A Apex-A). The centrepiece of the S-23E weapons system was the Sapfir-23D-III – an analogue, pulse radar. This utilised the – rather unreliable – 'envelope detection' technique to detect objects flying low over the ground: thanks to about 40 analogue filters used to suppress ground clutter, it was capable of projecting only radar echoes from moving targets on the ASP-23D sight in the cockpit. Certainly enough, in a look-down mode, or in a tail-chase type of engagement, the Sapfir-23D-III was extremely limited, having a detection range of barely 10-20 kilometres (5.3-10.6nm), respectively. It was already renowned as notoriously unreliable and its proper function was heavily dependent on constant fine-tuning of its AVM-23 analogue computer. Furthermore, it proved effective only over relatively flat terrain. However, by having a maximum detection range of about 45km (24nm) for fighter-sized targets at medium or high altitudes, in combination with R-23s, and *if* deployed with full support of a well-developed IADS – as already available in Syria – it was expected to prove at least a match for the F-15A/B Eagle, and superior to the Mirages and Kfirs. That said, conversion training of Syrian pilots and Soviet deliveries of MiG-23MFs advanced rather slowly: No. 67 Squadron was officially declared operational on this type only in May 1981.[33]

The Syrians expected even more from the MiG-25PD. Manufactured for export purposes only, this variant entered production in 1978. It was equipped with the massive, I-band, Smerch-A2 radar low PRF pulse radar, with a transmission power of an enormous 600KW, modified through the addition of an anti-jamming capability in the form of the 'azimuth only' mode. This system used an inverse cassegrain antenna capable of sweeping +/-30 degrees to the side and 'looking up' for up to 14 degrees in elevation, and had a maximum detection range for bomber-sized target of 100km (54nm), with the ability to track and engage from a range of 60km (32nm). However, contrary to the fire-control system of the F-15A delivered to Israel in 1976 (to be covered in detail in Volume 2), the Smerch-A2 lacked the look-down capability unless the aircraft was underway at or near its top operational ceiling. For this purpose the MiG-25PD was equipped with the same IRST as the MiG-23MF, though officially designated the 26Sh-1, installed in housing under the chin. Interceptor variants of the Foxbat were equipped with slightly improved (in comparison to their original variants) R-40RD (semi-active radar homing) and R-40TD (infra-red homing) air-to-air missiles (ASCC/NATO-codename 'AA-6 Acrid'), of which it could carry four – two under each wing. Although the biggest air-to-air missiles in world-wide service of the early 1970s, these had a maximum engagement range of only 50km (27nm): what did matter about the R-40s was their large, 70kg (154lbs) blast-fragmentation warhead. Because the R-40s could only sustain about 2.5gs, the MiG-25PDs were modified to carry up to four R-60M or R-60MK missiles instead of the outer

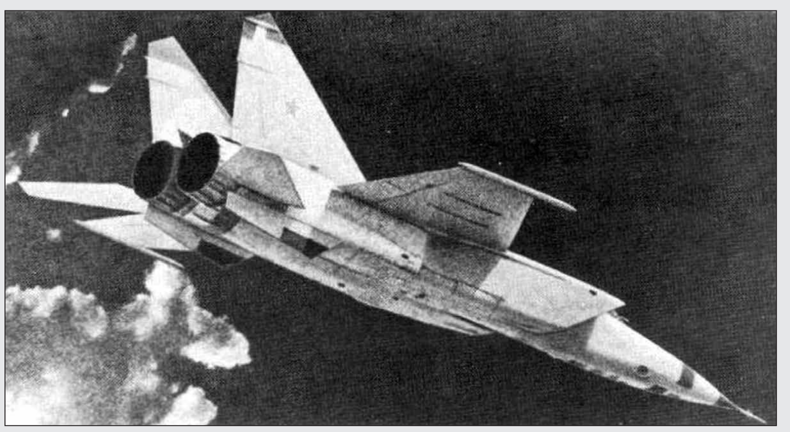
insurgency in Syria. On the contrary, by early 1978, the ferocity of attacks by the Muslim Brotherhood reached a point where some of its leaders – knowing that the vast majority of the Syrian population was unsympathetic to the establishment of a regime of Sharia Law – began distancing themselves from at-Tali'a al-Muqatila. Nevertheless, Assad meanwhile felt insecure enough to further intensify negotiations with Iraqi president, Ahmed Hassan al-Bakr, for a union of the two countries. Related talks had reached an advanced stage when news about them caused unrest within the Syrian Ba'ath Party: realising they would lose most of their privileges, the Alawites did their best to ruin the negotiations through ever new demands. Ultimately, endless negotiations went nowhere: between 11 and 16 July 1979, Saddam Hussein removed al-Bakr and took over in Baghdad. With this, the prospect of a union of Iraq and Syria went out of the window within less than a week.[32]

Overall, during the mid-1970s, the Syrian armed forces improved in quantity, though not in quality: essentially, their equipment and training remained the same as they were in October 1973. While acquiring large quantities of new T-55s, T-62s and BMP-1s, most of these were assigned to units de-facto reserved for the protection of the Assad regime. As the subsequent developments were to show, even the new aircraft – like MiG-23s and MiG-25s – were to prove insufficiently advanced in comparison with what the USA were meanwhile supplying to Israel: indeed, although the Syrian IADS was completely developed, equipped and trained according to Soviet doctrine, both of its two major facets – interceptors and ground-based air defence weapons – massively lagged behind the latest Western technology custom-tailored to counter it. Despite the acquisition of additional MiG-23BNs and the first batch of SA.342 Gazelle helicopters, as of 1978, the SyAAF – and thus the entire Syrian armed forces – was still sorely lacking in terms of offensive capability. As not only the experiences from the Syrian intervention in Lebanon of 1976 but also the subsequent developments were to show, even bigger deficiencies existed with regards to command facilities and training. Although Assad managed to re-establish the alliance with Moscow, combined with the growing insecurity at home, the strategic situation of Syria was thus more vulnerable than ever before.

pair of Acrids: however, although capable of tracking targets manoeuvring at up to 9gs, these were short-range weapons only. As far as is known, between 1979 and 1982, Syria received a total of 46 MiG-25s, of which 10 were MiG-25RBs. The latter was a dedicated reconnaissance variant, equipped with reconnaissance cameras and a relatively primitive ELINT-system. At least two of these were reportedly equipped to the MiG-25RBS standard, which included the Shompol side-borne looking radar (SLAR), but it remains unknown if these arrived before or after 1982: indeed, for all practical purposes, the Syrian fleet of Foxbats was still not operational as of that year.



The big radome of this Syrian MiG-25PD covered the Smerch-2A radar (at the time the most powerful system of this kind in Soviet and allied service). Notable are four huge R-40RD/TD air-to-air missiles installed underwing: the housing for the IRST was partially obstructed by the Syrian censor in this image. (Tom Cooper Collection)



The MiG-25RB was the reconnaissance variant of this powerful jet, easily recognizable by its small radome and dielectric panels covering antennas of its SIGINT-gathering system. (Tom Cooper Collection)



A MiG-25RB of the SyAAF about to touch-down on landing. The type proved a handful to fly, and thus the conversion process of Syrian pilots and ground personnel was rather protracted. Although flying its first operational sorties by 1981, the first units equipped with the type were declared operational only in mid-1982. (Tom Cooper Collection)

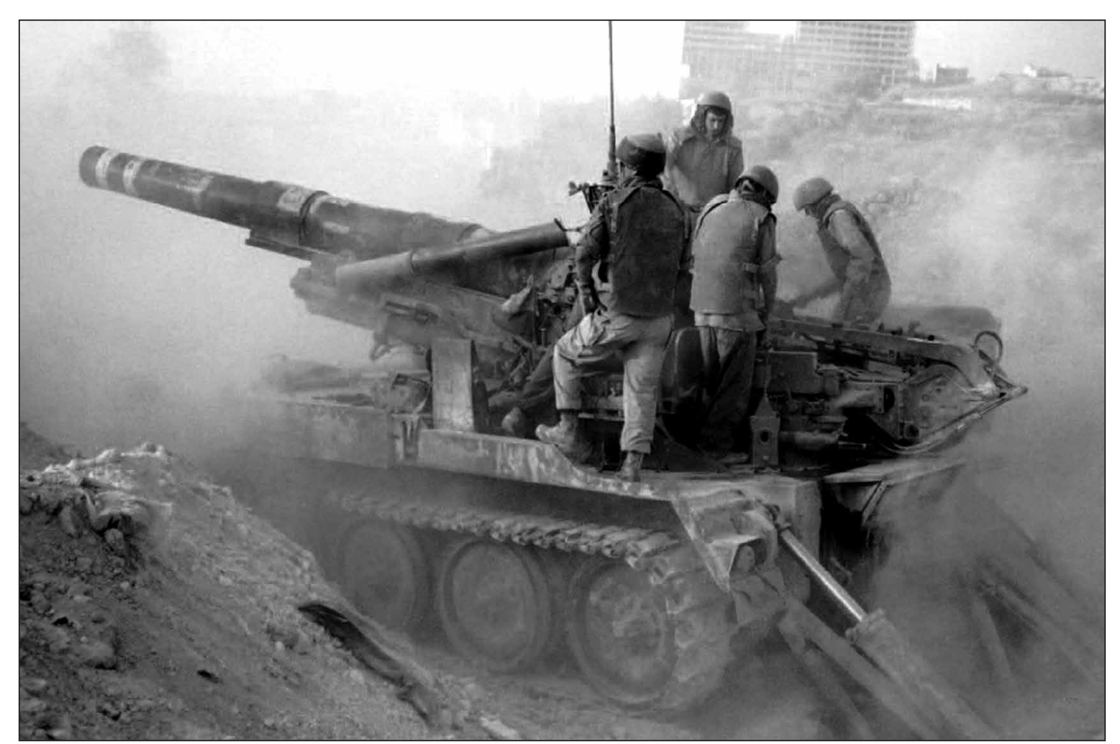
CHAPTER 6

A NEW SET OF CARDS

While maintaining a decisive military edge over all of its neighbours combined, winning three major wars and countless minor military victories, through the first quarter of century of its existence, Israeli leadership and its supporters in the USA and Western Europe never ceased expressing fears about the destruction of the Jewish homeland. Correspondingly, when the USA replaced France as Israel's primary supporter, in 1967-1969, Israel fully exploited the opportunity to acquire a huge amount of advanced armament. However, as soon as the October 1973 Arab-Israeli War made it clear that Egypt had developed not only a significant defensive- but also a modest offensive capability, the Israeli military build-up was bolstered by several magnitudes. This is how it happened that immediately after that conflict – at the same time Egypt de-facto ceased purchasing new arms, and attempted to open direct peace negotiations, while Syria was embroiled in internal unrest and then subjected to a Soviet arms embargo – Israel acquired a host of entirely new, and even more advanced weapons systems, provided in quantities unimaginable only a few years before. While all of this was provided in the name of defence, it was foremost used for offensive purposes – with unavoidable consequences: as not only a cease-fire, but also a lasting peace was concluded with Egypt (almost entirely at the insistence of President Sadat), the Israeli political and military leadership felt encouraged to embroil the country in ever additional adventures elsewhere.

IDF SHOPPING-SPREE

While overall the Israeli military was well prepared for war the events of October 1973 caught them by surprise: it quickly exposed multiple weaknesses in a doctrine where the mass of the IDF consisted of armour-heavy ground forces. Hundreds of tanks were destroyed by enemy infantry while lacking their own infantry-, artillery-, and air support. The 'flying artillery' of the IDF – the air force, which before that conflict was expected to easily and quickly smash any kind of opposition – suffered unprecedented losses while trying to act as a fire-brigade on two frontlines at once. Although it gradually regained superiority over the battlefield, it failed to deliver the support it was designed and planned to provide. Eventually, the Egyptian and Syrian air defences were partially neutralized, enabling the IDF/AF to operate freely, but not by air attacks: foremost by tanks, which often suffered unacceptable losses in the process. In the aftermath, this and a host of similar experiences prompted the ranking Israeli officials to question nearly everything about their


One of the major develpments in the IDF in the 1970s was the massive increase of its artillery corps. Amongst others, this was reinforced through the acquisition of 40 M110 self-propelled 203mm howitzers. (Mark Lepko Collection)

armed forces and introduce sweeping reforms. The mass of these became possible almost exclusively thanks to the US preparedness to provide not only almost every kind of military equipment Israel considered necessary, but also extensive financial and economic support. Indeed, the latter enabled the realisation of many indigenous Israeli designs, regardless if some of these were anything other than viable.[1]

One of the most significant changes within the IDF during the post-1973 period was the reinforced position of territorial commands. Poorly staffed and starved of resources at earlier times, these converted into primary command and control centres at the operational level, each equipped with its own signal battalion and ground reconnaissance teams, its own logistics regiment (including an ordnance unit with an armour workshop, multiple maintenance companies, heavy equipment transport unit and own ordnance depots), air defence- and artillery units. Each of the territorial commands thus had not only its own communication system, but became capable of collecting its own intelligence, and even had specific squadrons of the air force assigned.

Further down the chain of command, the IDF experienced an unprecedented expansion, too. Its standing force grew to 172,000 and the total mobilised reserves to 450,000. These were organised into 31 armoured, 10 mechanised infantry, five paratroop, 12 territorial infantry, and 15 artillery brigades, controlled by 11 and then a total of 15 divisional headquarters. Moreover, understanding that its tanks could not survive alone on the modern battlefield, and that they could not always count on the same amount of aerial support as in 1967, during the mid-1970s the IDF radically reconstituted itself into a combined arms military with integrated armour, mobile artillery and mobile infantry. Correspondingly, between 1973 and 1982, the Artillery Corps of the IDF was re-equipped with more than 400 M109 (155mm), 140 M107 (175mm) and 40 M110 (203mm) self-propelled howitzers. In reaction to the Soviet deliveries of 9K52 Luna-M (ASCC/NATO-codename 'FROG-7') and R-17E (ASCC/NATO-codename 'SS-1c Scud-B) ballistic missiles, it received several batteries and a total of 110 MGM-53 Lance tactical ballistic missiles.[2]

During the same period, the infantry of the IDF replaced its vintage M2 and M3 half-tracks and captured OT-62s (Czechoslovak variant of the Soviet-made BTR-50 APC) with no fewer than 4,800



Although lacking armour, the MD.500 Defender attack helicopter was highly appreciated by the IDF/AF for its small size, speed, manoeuvrability, and heavy armament of four TOW ATGMs. All examples were painted in brown-green colour (FS20095), applied overall and wore only a bare minimum of markings. (IDF)

M113 armoured personnel carriers. The – already massive – tank force of 1,225 Centurion, M48, M50/M51 and M60 MBTs of 1973 was expanded to 3,825 by 1982. By around the same time, each of the IDF's divisions was reorganized to include its own reconnaissance battalion, a signals battalion, and an armoured engineer battalion, a logistics regiment (including one ammunition-, one supply- and one medical battalion), two or three armoured, and one mechanized infantry brigade, and one artillery regiment.[3]

Another consequence of the shock of the October 1973 War was the acquisition of armed helicopters with the aim of establishing a rapid-response anti-armour capability against another possible surprise attack. Following extensive studies of US experiences from the Vietnam War, in 1974 the IDF/AF started placing a series of orders for a total of 12 second-hand (ex-US Marine Corps) Bell AH-1Gs, 18 AH-1Qs and 20 AH-1Fs. Eventually, all were brought to the AH-1F standard, and equipped with BGM-72 TOW anti-tank guided missiles (ATGMs). Also equipped with TOWs were 32 Hughes MD.500 Defender light – and much cheaper – helicopters, acquired following extensive evaluation in Israel in mid-1977, even though their deliveries began only in April 1980. This force of attack helicopters was closely integrated with ground units and by 1982 the IDF operated a brigade consisting of three paratroop battalions equipped with BGM-72s and two attack helicopter squadrons.[4]

REAL-TIME INTELLIGENCE

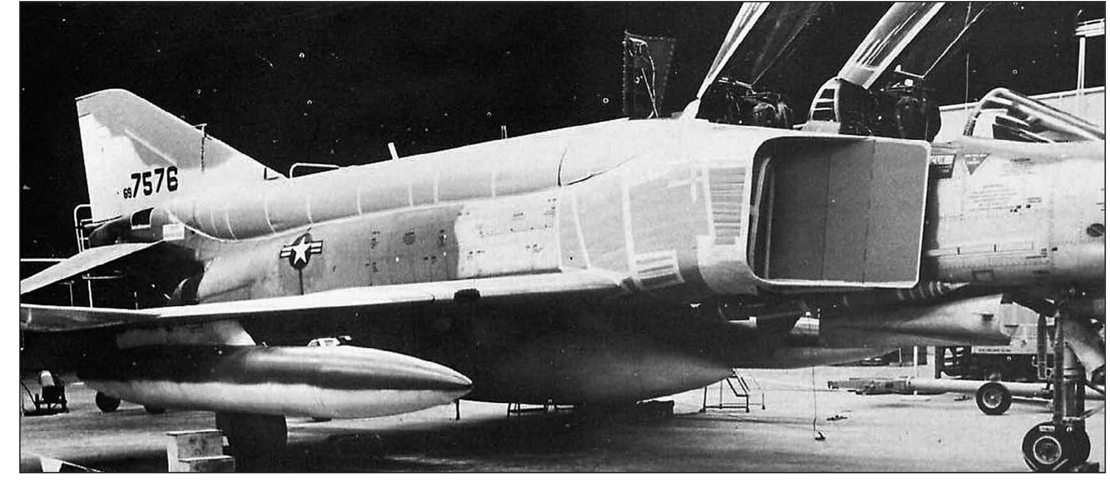
However, all the investment into new and additional armoured vehicles and self-propelled artillery was nothing in comparison to the Israeli investment into intelligence-gathering and reconnaissance. Indeed, it can be said that after the October 1973 War the IDF learned that wars were won or lost on the basis of available information, and subsequently became obsessed with obtaining advanced intelligence-gathering technology, and especially with obtaining the ability to collect and make use of information in so-called 'real time'. In other words: right away.

The fleet and the capabilities of the Israeli flying reconnaissance platforms experienced a huge increase during the 1970s. While at earlier times the IDF/AF's 'stars' in this field were two Mirage IIIRJs, four adapted Mirage IIICJs and several modified Vautour IIBs – of which the Mirages were equipped with a wide range of indigenously developed photo-reconnaissance installations in interchangeable noses – by 1978 the air force operated a large fleet of aircraft capable of running electronic intelligence (ELINT), signals intelligence (SIGINT) and electronic countermeasures (ECM) operations. These included 6 Boeing 707-320s (all equipped for ELINT and ECM operations and to which 6 equipped as tankers were to follow during the early 1980s), 2 EC-130Hs (in addition to one KC-130H tanker), 3 Grumman OV-1E Mohawks, 5 IAI.201 Aravas, 6 Beechcraft RU-21D and 3 RU-21A Guardrail Vs, and a small number of IAI Westwind/Sea Scan maritime patrol aircraft (MPAs). Priority in their equipment and capability was assigned to the collection of real-time, or at least near-real-time, intelligence on the activity of enemy air defence systems.[5]

In 1978, Israel acquired four Grumman E-2C Hawkeye Group 0 airborne early warning (AEW) aircraft. Equipped with the then brand-new AN/APS-125 radar (soon after upgraded to the AN/



The major advantages of the Israeli – in comparison to the Syrian – armed forces of the late 1970s were within the realms of communications-, signals- and electronic intelligence. Thanks to the availability of the latest technologies from the USA, the IDF was capable of collecting high-quality information in real-time, and forwarding the same directly to its commanders. Unsurprisingly, every dominating peak in northern Israel and on the occupied Golan Heights was occupied by another COMINT/SIGINT-site, including this one at Tel Faris, overlooking the Syrian town of Qunaitra (completely demolished by the withdrawing IDF in 1976). (Photo by David Nicolle)



The F-4EX Peace Jack was the result of an attempt to make the Phantom capable of reaching speeds above Mach 3, and equip it with a LOROP camera in a stretched nose. Serving as a prototype was this Israeli F-4E, on which the mock fuel tanks and a much larger intake (both made of cardboard) are clearly visible. (McDonnell-Douglas)

APS-138 standard) capable of automatically tracking up to 300 aircraft (and ground targets) and vectoring dozens of their own interceptors, the type took over the role of acting as an airborne command post, and became the centrepiece of the entire air warfare system of the IDF/AF.

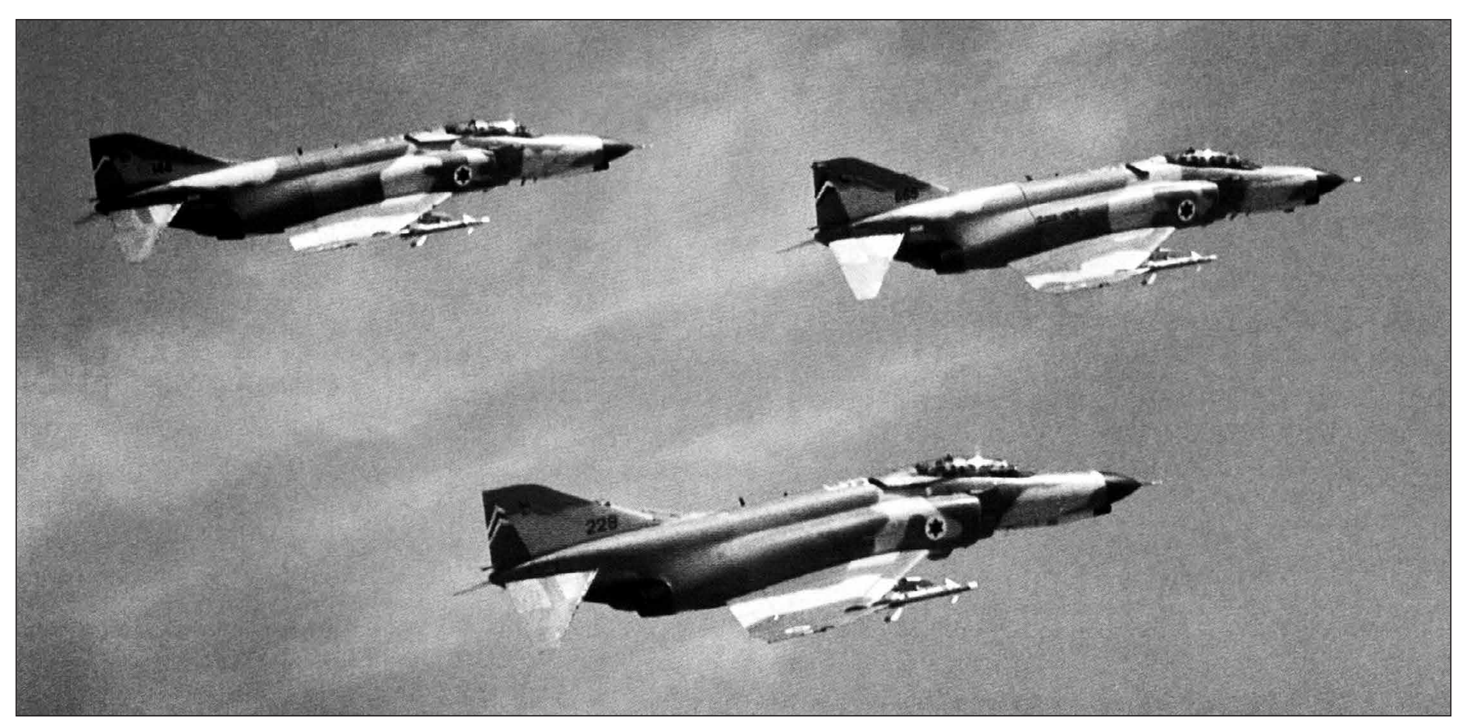
For photo-reconnaissance purposes, the relatively limited capabilities of the Mirages were greatly enhanced by 6 RF-4Es, the first of which arrived in February 1971. While one was shot down by a Syrian SAM in 1974 (the navigator was killed, while the pilot ejected at Mach 1.7 and an altitude of 14,630m/48,000ft), six additional examples were ordered after the October 1973 War. Right from the start, Israeli reconnaissance Phantoms could be armed with AIM-9 Sidewinder missiles and were equipped with Goodyear APQ-102A synthetic aperture radars capable of terrain mapping and AAS-118 infra-red line scanners: after the October War, at least four of the original aircraft had their radars removed and replaced by installations for additional cameras inside the radome, instead. Moreover, since 1971, the IDF/AF operated the General Dynamics G-139 pods on its RF-4Es. This huge, canoe-like construction contained the HIAC-1 long-range oblique photography (LOROP) camera with a 168cm (66in) focal-length lens capable of resolving a 25cm (10in) object from 37km (23 miles) range. Although the installation of the big and hefty G-139 significantly reduced the aircraft's performance, related operations became of particular importance due to the growing SAM-threat, and their results proved worth even more investment. Therefore, from 1971 the IDF/AF joined the USAF in Project Peace Jack, which aimed at developing a Phantom-variant capable of reaching speeds of Mach 3.2 at high altitudes. In 1975, the Americans abandoned this idea over concerns it might have negative impacts upon the then brand-new McDonnell-Douglas F-15A Eagle interceptor: the Israelis continued cooperation with General Dynamics, though with the result that a downsized variant of the HIAC-1 LOROP was eventually installed inside the 30cm/12in longer nose of three of the IDF/AF's F-4Es, resulting in the variant designated F-4E(Special) – or F-4E(S). Shrouded in secrecy, the flight-test program commenced in December 1975, and the first two modified Phantoms reached Israel a year later and flew at least three operational high-altitude reconnaissance sorties.[6]

Furthermore, because the Mirage IIIRJs were nearing the end of their service life and were now operated by reserve units, in the mid-1970s the IDF/AF and the IAI adapted two Kfir C.2s (serials 419 and 451/851) for reconnaissance operations. For this purpose, both aircraft could be equipped with a wide range of reconnaissance noses, some of which were exceptionally long, with fully rotating barrel assemblies for oblique photography.[7]

The IDF/AF did not pioneer the operation of unmanned vehicles (UAVs) – or remotely piloted vehicles (RPVs) – for reconnaissance purposes, but it did significantly contribute to their further development. Available since the early 1970s were models such as the Teledyne Ryan 124I Firebee and Northrop MQM-74A Chukar I of US origin. Both were operated by No. 200 Squadron for real-time intelligence-gathering missions over enemy air defences, or as decoys, respectively. Following the October 1973 War, the related IDF/AF capabilities evolved tremendously through the acquisition of additional MQM-74C Chukars and their equipment with reconnaissance cameras. In the late 1970s, the indigenous Tadiran Mastiff and the IAI Scout mini-RPVs also became available, both equipped with video cameras with telescopic lenses and forward-looking infra-red (FLIR) systems: thanks to their small radar-, and aural- and visual signatures, and good endurance, both soon began playing a crucial role in battlefield surveillance, artillery spotting, and also in the search for enemy SAM-sites.

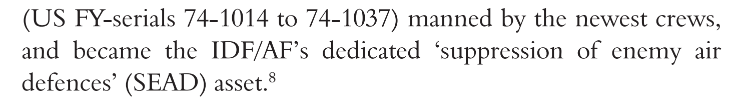
THE SAM-KILLER FORCE

The acquisition of multiple platforms capable of collecting real-time intelligence had its direct impact upon the further development of the F-4E Phantom II-fleet of the IDF/AF: because reconnaissance became capable of finding, tracking and precisely pin-pointing SAM-sites with the help of UAVs, the decision was taken to convert these nominal 'bomb trucks' into platforms capable of delivering



Reinforced to about 150 airframes, and upgraded through the addition of advanced avionics and weaponry, the F-4E-fleet was the main striking force of the IDF/AF in the 1970s. However, while still regularly used as an interceptor at earlier times, the mighty Phantom II was meanwhile foremost deployed for ground-attack and SEAD-purposes. This photograph shows three examples armed with Python Mk.III air-to-air missiles and – partially – equipped with in-flight-refuelling probes, both of which were added in the late 1970s. (IDF)

precise strikes upon enemy air defences. Down to a mere 80 operational airframes by 12 October 1973, the IDF/AF's F-4E-fleet was greatly rebuilt through deliveries of 34 ex-USAF aircraft to replace losses, and then by the delivery of 48 brand-new examples over the following two years (including a batch of 24 originally manufactured for the USAF and diverted straight off the production line). Moreover, the IDF/AF massively accelerated the training of new crews, and finally had more of these than of the Phantoms. Because contemporary precision guided munitions (PGMs) were relatively complex, the IDF took a few shortcuts and opted to specialize specific units in the use of specific weapons. Correspondingly, the aircraft and crews operated by No. 69 Squadron and already operational on US-made AGM-62 Walleye electro-optically guided glide bombs, also received AGM-65 Maverick electro-optically guided missiles, and the Rafael-manufactured variant of the Walleye (which the Israelis considered unsatisfactory), the Tadmit. No. 107 Squadron also used the Tadmit, while No. 119 and No. 201 Squadrons were equipped and trained in deployment of US-made laser-guided bombs of the Paveway I and II family with the help of the AN/AVQ-23 Pave Spike laser designator, and of GBU-8 (No. 119) and GBU-15(V)1 (No. 201) electro-optically guided bombs, with which they could target SAM-sites from stand-off ranges. Moreover, in 1974, the IDF/AF established its fifth Phantom-unit, by equipping No. 105 Squadron (which used to fly SMB.2s) with F-4Es and AGM-78 Standard Anti-Radar Missiles (ARMs). Declared operational in March 1975, this unit flew the newest airframes



(US FY-serials 74-1014 to 74-1037) manned by the newest crews, and became the IDF/AF's dedicated 'suppression of enemy air defences' (SEAD) asset.[8]



It took years to bring the huge and diverse IDF/AF-fleet of more than 250 Skyhawks to the same standard. Indeed, it was only in around 1978 that all the operational airframes were upgraded into the A-4N variant. This A-4H was photographed shortly after the October 1973 War. (Albert Grandolini Collection)



No. 140 'Golden Eagle' Squadron of the IDF/AF was the last to convert to the A-4 Skyhawk. Acting as an operational conversion unit, it operated a mix of older A-4Es, like the xample in this photograph, and the latest A-4Ns. (IDF)

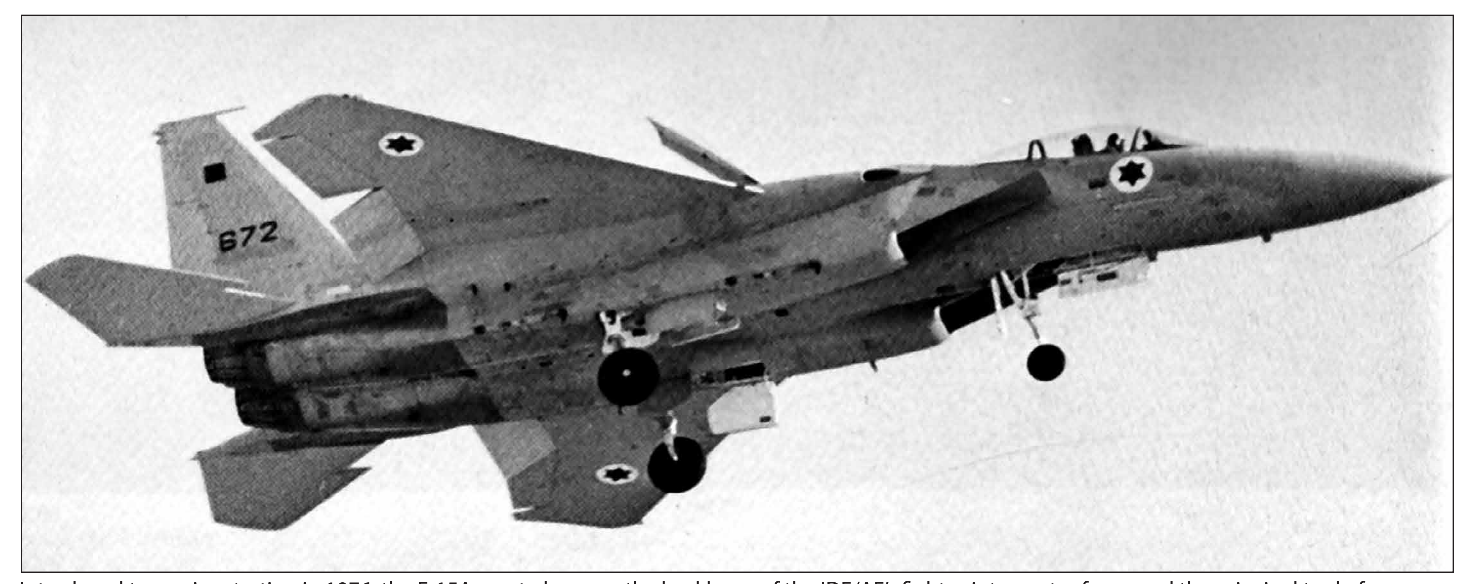


The Kfir came into being through the cooperation of Rockwell and Lockheed (USA), with Dassault, and the necessary US financing, which enabled not only the build-up of Israel Aircraft Industries, but also the production of the new Mirage-like fighter-bomber to be launched in 1975. (IAI)

Finally, the entire F-4E-fleet was meanwhile subjected to a host of upgrades, including the installation of the Elbit Jason digital weapons delivery system, Litton LW-33 digital inertial navigation



Starting in 1978, the IDF/AF began painting its Kfir C.2s in this two-tone camouflage pattern, similar to that of its new F-15A/B Eagle interceptors. Moreover, the entire fleet received large canard foreplanes, visible atop of the intakes. This example was photographed while in the process of being loaded with launchers for unguided rockets. (IDF)



Introduced to service starting in 1976, the F-15A was to become the backbone of the IDF/AF's fighter-interceptor force, and the principal tool of establishing its total aerial superiority. No. 133 Squadron flew its first 20 operational sorties during Operation Litani in March 1978. (IDF)

attack system, new radar-warning-receivers (RWRs), and chaff and flare dispensers (each aircraft received two attached to the aft end of every inboard underwing pylon).

MAINTAINING NUMBERS

After the Rockwell Corporation established itself in Israel, helped build-up the IAI and clandestinely imported 51 Mirage 5Js from France, in 1968-1970, the idea was arrived at to adapt the remaining Mirage IIICJ and then the Mirage 5Js to accommodate the US-made General Electric J79-GE-17 engine – the powerplant of the F-4E Phantom II. However, this proved much more complex to realise than expected, because the J79 not only had a greater diameter, but also was shorter while generating much more heat than the original French-made powerplants, the SNECMA Atar 09B and Atar 09C. Unsurprisingly, this adaptation proved beyond the abilities of the IAI, and thus Rockwell sent Gene Salvay, one of its best and most experienced aircraft designers to Israel. In turn, Salvay requested help from Dassault and from Lockheed's engineer Ben Rich. Their cooperation resulted in an aircraft named 'Ra'am B', that made its first flight on 4 June 1973, but the series production of which was postponed by the October 1973 War: eventually, the first of 27 examples of what became known as the IAI Kfir, were completed only in early 1975.[9]

This first variant – later re-designated as the Kfir C.1 – utilised the Elta EL-2001 ranging radar, and a relatively simple weapon release system, yet proved significantly heavier and less manoeuvrable than the Mirage 5J, necessitating further aerodynamic refinements. The resulting Kfir C.2 introduced small canard foreplanes and an

Table 6: IDF/AF order of battle, 1978			
Unit	**Base**	**Equipment**	**Remarks**
C-in-C IDF/AF Major-General David Ivry			
1st Air Wing	Ramat David		
No. 69 Squadron 'Hammers'	"	F-4E, RF-4E	
No. 109 Squadron 'Valley'	"	A-4H TAAL-Crystal[11] A-4N, then Kfir C.1 and C.2	operational on Kfir since July 1977
No. 110 Squadron 'Knights of the North'	"	A-4E/H	operational on A-4H since 1977
No. 117 Squadron 'First Jet'	"	Mirage IIICJ	
21st Air Base	Haifa		
IDF/AF Technical School	"		
IDF/AF Technical College	"		
2nd Air Wing	Sdot Micha		
No. 150 Squadron	"	MD.620 Jericho I	20-30 ballistic missiles equipped with nuclear warheads
8th Air Base	Tel Nov		
Flight Test Centre	"	Mirage IIIBJ, Mirage 5J	flight- and weapons testing; not involved in combat operations
No. 114 Squadron 'Night Leaders'	"	5 SA.321Ka, 9 SA.321Kb, few S-65C-2/3	
No. 115 Squadron 'Flying Dragon'	"	A-4N	
No. 116 Squadron 'Flying Wing'	"	A-4N	
No. 118 Squadron 'Night Predators'	"	S-65C-2/3, CH-53A	11 S-65C and 10 CH-53A available
No. 119 Squadron 'Bat'	"	F-4E, RF-4E, F-4E(S)	F-4Es were AGM-45 compatible
No. 123 Squadron 'Southern Bell'	"	AB.205A, Bell 205A	
No. 124 Squadron 'Rolling Sword'	"	Bell 205, Bell 212	moved to Palmachim in 1978-1981
No. 125 Squadron	"	SE.3130 Alouette II, Bell 206A/B	
No. 133 Squadron 'Twin Tail'	"	F-15A/B	operational on F-15 since December 1976, from 1981 including F-15C/Ds of the future No. 106 'Spearhead' Squadron
No. 160 Squadron 'First Attack Helicopter'	"	AH-1F	moved to Palmachim in 1979
Unit 669	"	Bell 205, CH-53	established in 1974; combat search and rescue
AMU22	"		depot level maintenance
27th Air Base	Lod IAP		
No. 103 Squadron 'Flying Elephant'	"	C-130E, KC-130H	at Tel Nov AB until 1974; airframes shared with No. 131 Squadron
No. 120 Squadron 'International'	"	Boeing 707-320 ELINT/ ECM, Seascan	
No. 122 Squadron 'Pioneer'	"	C-47, OV-1D, Arava 201	
No. 131 Squadron 'Yellow Bird'	"	C-130E, EC-130H	
15th Air Wing	Sde Dov		also 'Light Transport Wing'
No. 100 Squadron 'Flying Camel'	"	Cessna, 206, Do.27, Do.28	
No. 125 Squadron 'Light Helicopter'	"	Bell 206, Bell 206L	
No. 135 Squadron 'Light Transport'	"	BN-2, Cessna 206	transport and OTU
30th Air Base	Palmachim		

Continued on page 74

Continued from page 73

Table 6: IDF/AF order of battle, 1978			
No. 190 Squadron 'Magic Touch'	"	MD.500	for operations over Lebanon, always forward deployed to Ramat David AB
No 200 Squadron 'First UAV'	"	Model 124I, MQM-74, Scout	
4th Air Wing	Hatzor		
No. 101 Squadron 'First Fighter'	"	Kfir C.2	operational on Kfir since April 1975
No. 105 Squadron 'Scorpion'	"	F-4E	
No. 113 Squadron 'Hornet'	"	Mirage 5/Nesher S, then Kfir C.1, then Kfir C.2	operational on Kfir since 1976; on Kfir C.2 since 1979
No. 201 Squadron 'The One'	"	F-4E	
No. 253 Squadron 'Negev'	"	Mirage 5J	established in July 1976, then to Eitam AB; re-equipped with Mirage IIICJs in June 1979
No. 254 Squadron 'Midland'	"	Mirage IIIJ	established in April 1981
6th Air Base	Hatserim		
No. 102 Squadron 'Flying Tigers'	"	A-4E/F/H	
No. 107 Squadron 'Orange Tail'	"	F-4E, RF-4E	
No. 123 Squadron 'Southern Bell'	"	Bell 205	
No. 147 Squadron 'Battering Ram'	"	A-4E/F/H/N	established in August 1978
No. 192 Squadron 'Hawkeye'	"	E-2C	established in August 1978
Flight School Unit	"	Piper Super Cub, Fouga CM.170 Magister, A-4E/H, TA-4H/J, Bell 206	
10th Air Wing	Etzion		
No. 140 Squadron 'Golden Eagle'	"	A-4E/N	operational conversion unit; operational on A-4N since 1976
No. 144 Squadron 'Protectors of the Arava/Phoenix'	"	Mirage 5J	
No. 149 Squadron 'Smashing Parrot'	"	A-4E, then Kfir C.2	operational on Kfir C.2 following re-deployment to Ovda AB, in 1981
3rd Air Base	Refidim		
			no permanently assigned units
5th Air Base	el-Arish		
			no permanently assigned units
7th Air Base	Bir Tamada		
			no permanently assigned units
29th Air Base	Ophir		Base also known as Ras Nasrani
			no permanently assigned units

integrated, computer-supported weapon delivery system coupled with an inertial navigation platform, an air data computer, ranging radar, and a heads-up-display (HUD). Series production of the Kfir C.2 was launched in 1976, by when it included a re-designed wing and enlarged canards. However, even at this point in time the IAI still relied on foreign assistance: not only were most of the avionics still of US and French origin, but also the production of the two-seat conversion variant – the Kfir TC.2, which retained combat capability but carried less fuel – required the import of fuselages from France. While 210 Kfirs (including the most advanced variant, the C.7, introduced in 1984) were manufactured between 1975 and 1986, because of the type's underperformance in comparison to expectations, and persistent maintenance issues (which regularly kept about 40% of the fleet grounded) the IDF/AF never operated more than about 90 at the same time.[10]

With the Kfir being late into service and then failing to reach expectations, the IDF/AF continued to rely on the huge number of slower and lighter A-4 Skyhawks as its backbone during the 1970s. Between 1968 and 1974, Israel placed orders for a total of 257 A-4E/F/H/N, 20 TA-4Hs and 15 TA-4Js. Slightly over a half of these were

Table 7: Israeli arms imports in contemporary millions of US dollars

Year	Officially Published Values	Actual Military Import Payments	Indirect Defence Imports	US FMS aid
1970	230			
1971	260			
1972	300			
1973	230			
1974	950			
1975	725			
1976	975			
1977	1,100	1,325	420	1,115
1978	925	1,690	555	1,397
1979	525	1,420	640	1,170
1980		2,018	720	1,768
1981		2,404	900	1,907
1982		2,055	1,000	2,196
1983		1,958	1,100	2,034

delivered by October 1973: the IDF/AF entered that war with a total of 162 Skyhawks, wrote off 53, and had these replaced by the prompt delivery of 46 A-4Es from the surplus stocks of the US Navy. In 1974, a massive effort was launched to bring all the 155 surviving- and all newly-manufactured examples – now operated by five units – to the same standard, the A-4N TAAL-Chrystal. This included an advanced fire-control system with a HUD, a modern ECM-system and chaff and flare dispensers, installation of French-made 30mm DEFA cannons instead of the US-made 20mm, and compatibility with a wide range of weapons including AGM-45 Shrike and AGM-65 Maverick missiles. Moreover, during the October 1973 War, the fleet had already received the so-called 'barrel': a tube-like extension over the engine exhaust, which served the purpose of lessening the effects of the blast from infra-red homing missiles. By 1978, eight operational squadrons were flying A-4Ns, A-4Hs and TA-4H/Js.

NEW INTERCEPTORS AND AIR-TO-AIR MISSILES

Under the circumstances described above, the principal fighter-interceptors of the IDF/AF during and immediately after the October 1973 War were still about 40 French-made Mirage IIICJ and 50 Mirage 5s, supported by F-4Es. All three types proved vastly superior to the MiG-21s that formed the backbone of the Arab air forces – partially due to their superior flight performances, but especially because of their much more advanced weapons and far better cockpit ergonomics. Nevertheless, immediately after this conflict the IDF/AF launched the evaluation of two entirely new types of US-made fighter-interceptors: the Grumman F-14A Tomcat and the McDonnell-Douglas F-15A Eagle. In 1975, the selection fell on the latter, and Israel requested the delivery of 50 aircraft. Because of other priorities, not enough funding was available for all of them at once and thus the deliveries proceeded at a somewhat irregular rate. The first batch included 23 F-15As (amongst them four refurbished examples from the pre-production series), and 2 F-15B two-seaters with full combat capability, and was delivered between 1976 and 1978. The second order – deliveries of which lasted until April 1982 – included 9 F-15Cs and 6 F-15Ds.

All interceptors were equipped with an entirely new generation of US-made air-to-air guided missiles: first batches of the brand-new, infra-red homing AIM-9G Sidewinder short-range missile (developed for the US Navy, and proving vastly superior to any of the variants developed for the USAF) became available during October 1973 and promptly proved a true 'killer', easily outmatching older AIM-9Ds and Israeli-made Shafrir Mk.IIs, which in turn proved far better than any of contemporary Soviet-made missiles delivered to Arab air forces. Together with the Eagles, the IDF/AF also received AIM-7F Sparrow semi-active radar homing missiles with medium range and further improved AIM-9H Sidewinders, while the domestic industry developed an advanced variant of the Shafrir Mk.II in form of the Python Mk.III, which entered service from 1979. While the Shafrir Mk.II was only installed on Mirages, and never on Phantoms or Eagles, the Python Mk.III was – although being larger and heavier. Combined with F-15s and E-2C Hawkeyes, these new missiles were soon to achieve the total aerial superiority the IDF/AF has enjoyed in the skies over the Middle East ever since.

PROBLEMS[12]

Even if supported by extensive financial support from the USA – which provided total military and economic aid worth US$21 billion between 1948 and 1982 – such a massive expansion of the IDF came at a hefty financial and human price: indeed, building and maintaining the vastly expanded armed forces have absorbed a large part of the government's resources, contributing to budget deficits that caused a triple-digit inflation (the world's highest in the late 1970s and early 1980s). While in 1973 the Israeli cabinet originally allocated US$1.48 billion or 27.4% of the gross national product to defence purposes, this amount reached 50% by the end of the same year, and was then maintained at about 40% for the next three years. Even as of 1982, it was still at 31.9%. As the known values listed in Table 7 show, even this was neither enough nor all, and the USA began spending at least as much on Israeli defence through its Foreign Military Sales (FMS) credit system and support for indirect defence imports.[13]

Financial problems, hyperinflation and growing unemployment were one aspect of the issues troubling Israel during this period. Those troubling the IDF were at least as massive. For example, heavy losses during the October 1973 War, the establishment of additional units, the growing importance of territorial commands, and requirements to train the expanded standing- and reserve forces put the IDF's officer corps and the corps of non-commissioned officers (NCOs) under an immense strain. The solution found was the only one available: accelerated promotion of the available personnel. The consequence was unavoidable: at the time the new equipment became more complex than ever before, the IDF significantly lowered its quality standards.

Further issues were organisational by nature. While reforms introduced during the mid-1970s streamlined command and control procedures, greatly improving the flow of intelligence information



PLO's fedayeen with one of the AMX-13 light tanks captured from the SLA in southern Lebanon in 1978. (Albert Grandolini Collection)

between the air and ground forces, each of the IDF's territorial command began 'specialising': developing doctrine specific to its own area. In an attempt to counter such tendencies – and an actually understandable development of units tailored to local circumstances – the IDF attempted to rotate its units through diverse commands during their field exercises. Furthermore, while recognizing that certain tank types were better suited to specific environments and terrain, the IDF insisted on equipping its armoured brigades and battalions with a mix of different types. Many thus ended up operating one battalion each of Centurions, M48s and/or M60s: indeed, there were even tank battalions operating two or three different types, in turn making their maintenance and spares supply a major issue. The IDF/AF was also testing different concepts. One of these was an attempt to man an A-4 Skyhawk unit with reservists along with a cadre of regulars. Not favoured by either, this experiment was quickly abandoned and the unit in question subsequently reverted to the usual composition of regulars, pilots on emergency postings, and reservists.

An unavoidable overall result of all of these and many additional factors was a gradual decline in quality of the standing forces of the IDF, and an increased reliance on technology and firepower as substitutes for traditional qualities like leadership and initiative.

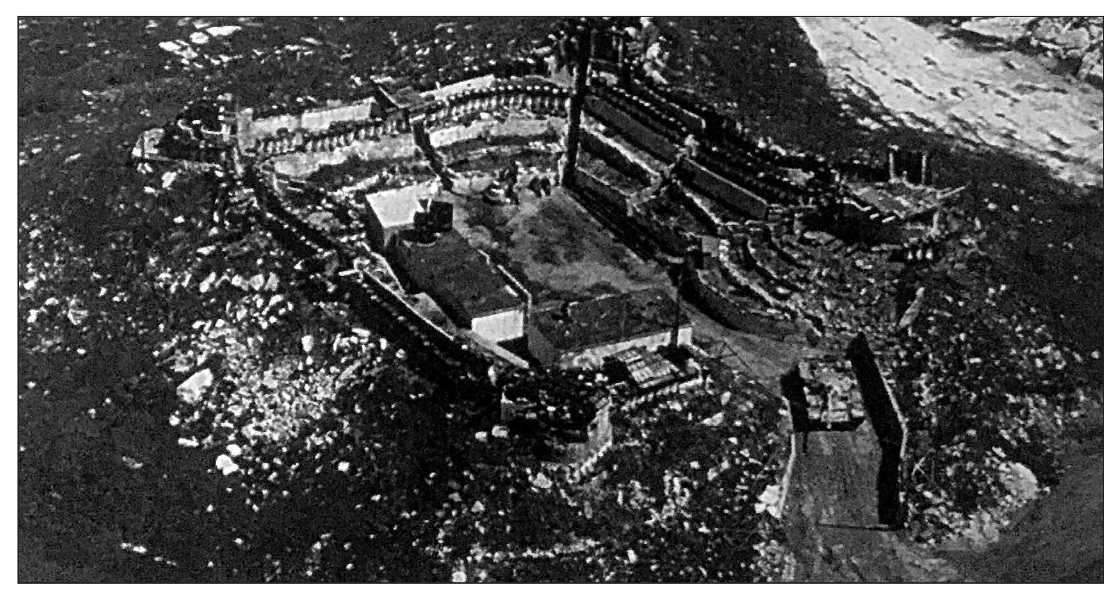
DISSOLUTION OF THE ADF

On 16 March 1977, Kamal Jumblatt – traditional leader of the Druze community and former minister of the Lebanese government – was gunned down by unknown assassins near the village of Baakline in the Chouf mountains. His death prompted a series of massacres of Christian civilians that converted another 260,000 people into homeless refugees. Suspecting Assad – or at least the Syrian Ba'ath Party – of responsibility for this act, the Christian leaders (foremost Chamoun and Frangieh) began openly calling for a Syrian withdrawal: falsely and deceptively accusing the Syrians of an 'occupation' and a 'genocide', exploiting the fact that the Syrians refused to remove their checkpoints from the entries to all major Lebanese army bases, and in a renewed attempt to attract additional Israeli support, they began attacking ADF troops. Actually, the Lebanese Christians were well-informed about Assad's growing problems at home and, reinforced by the flow of Israeli arms and supplies, launched preparations for an offensive with the aim of expelling Syrian forces from Lebanon – which in turn was also understood as a pre-requisite for defeating the PLO in the country.[14]

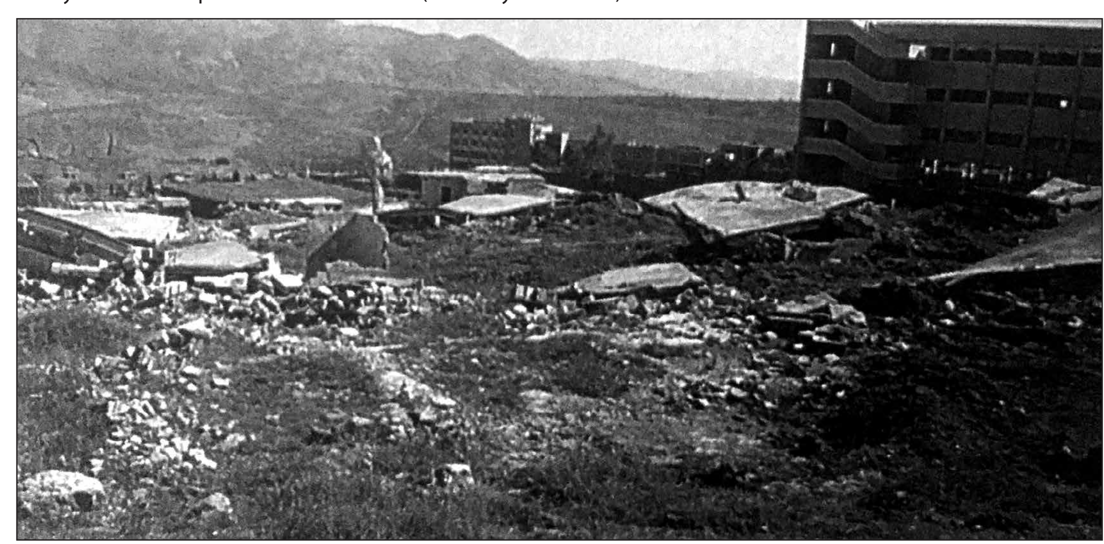
The campaign of Christian attacks on Syrian elements of the ADF culminated on 7 February 1978, when – after a deadly assault on one of its positions – the Syrian Arab Army lost its nerve and shelled the Christian residential neighbourhoods of Ain ar-Remmaneh, Karma az-Zeitoun and Badaro, killing over 100 and injuring 200.[15] This atrocity prompted most ADF members to openly dissociate themselves from Damascus: Sudan immediately withdrew its contingent. Saudi Arabia followed in March, while the United Arab Emirates and North Yemen did so in April 1978.[16]

Combined with improved relations between Syria, the PLO and diverse Muslim factions, the Syrian presence in the country now did start to resemble a military occupation, in which they were openly confronting the Maronites. This became obvious in early 1978, when Assad ordered the well-trained Saiqa troops to join the PLO in its (low-intensity) operations against Haddad's forces. Haddad counterattacked and seized the village of Maroun ar-Ras,

in the central sector of the Lebanese-Israeli border and positioned high above the town of Bint Jubayl, a major fedayeen stronghold, on 2 March 1976. This time, not only the PLO and Saiqa, but even the SyAA counterattacked and expelled the SLA, a few days later. Forced to acknowledge that Haddad was unable to establish and maintain security along the border, and having Lebanon free of the ADF, Begin's government thus began searching for an excuse to launch its own intervention in the country.[17]



One of the SLA's fortifications overlooking the coastal road. Notable is one of the T-54/55 MBTs upgraded in Israel to the Tyran standard parked at the entrance. (Photo by Al J Venter)



This south Lebanese village was one of several intentionally demolished during Operation Litani. Combined with the IDF/AF's campaign of massive air raids on the Lebanese population in 1981 (to be described in Volume 2), such actions were to have severe consequences for Israel in the long term. (Photo by Al J Venter)

THE COASTAL ROAD MASSACRE

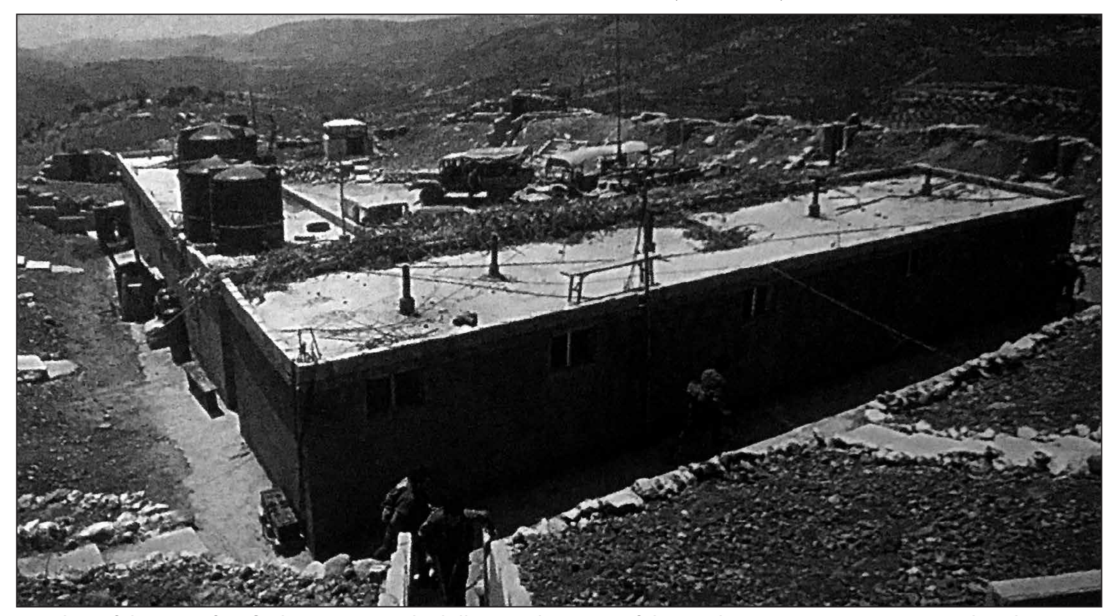
As if on an Israeli order, on 9 March 1978, a group of 13 Fatah's fedayeen led by Dalal al-Mughrabi set off from Damour to land on the Israeli coast. Two days later, one of the craft carrying them capsized and two drowned. The survivors transferred to two smaller 'Zodiac' boats and continued their deadly mission: on the morning of 11 March, they landed near Kibbutz Ma'agan Michael, about 30 kilometres south of Haifa. Once on the shore, they shot an American woman taking photos of wildlife, shot to pieces a passing taxi, killing its occupants, and then hijacked a civilian bus. Underway for Tel Aviv, the fedayeen shot and threw hand grenades at passing cars, before encountering another bus, and ordering its passengers to pile into the first one. With over 70 hostages on board, they continued their deadly rampage, crashing through one police roadblock before being stopped at another. A major gunfight ensued in which the militants were finally overwhelmed – but at a tragic price: by the time the shooting ended, 37 Israelis (including 13 children), and 1 US Citizen, and 10 out of 12 militants were killed, and 71 people wounded.[18]

Supported by a fully understandable public outrage, Begin ordered an attack into southern Lebanon: at dawn of 14 March 1978, artillery of the Northern Command IDF opened fire on Lebanese villages controlled by the PLO and allies, thus starting Operation Stone of Wisdom.[19]

A STOMPING GOLIATH

With hindsight, it is clear that Operation Stone of Wisdom – also known as 'Operation Litani', or the 'Litani War of 1978' – was heavily politicised, and by no means spontaneous, but an enterprise long in preparation. To say its motivation was obscure would be an understatement: the official aim was to 'liquidate the PLO', to 'wipe out' all fedayeen concentrations along the full length of the Israeli-Lebanese border, and destroy bases from which these were raiding Israel. While there is no doubt that the Palestinian artillery and rocket attacks from southern Lebanon were causing material damage, they were causing next to no civilian casualties. On the contrary, the vast majority of most devastating attacks *within* Israel took place in the form of hostage takings and suicide assaults – which could be, and regularly were – launched from almost any geographic location. Moreover, the Palestinian artillery had a range of 15-20 kilometres; rocket artillery could reach out to 30 kilometres – all of which meant that establishing a 10-kilometre buffer zone as planned by the IDF and announced in the Knesset, the Israeli Parliament, was, at best, insufficient. Finally, the IDF was perfectly aware of the fact that the PLO had no illusions about its ability to withstand its assault: quantitatively and qualitatively it was hopelessly outgunned. Therefore, its commanders had to expect that the Palestinians would disperse and withdraw, while offering only feeble resistance in the form of harassing attacks by small groups that would make full use of the terrain. On the contrary: not only the repeated Israeli assaults on the civilian population and

A map showing the two UNIFIL zones in southern Lebanon after Operation Litani. Notable are the big 'enclave' controlled by the SLA along the border with Israel, and a sizeable, PLO-controlled 'pocket' around the port of Tyre. (Map by Tom Cooper)



Another of the SLA's fortified positions in the hills near the coast of the Mediterranean Sea: it remained under Haddad's control even once the Irish contingent of UNIFIL moved in. (Photo by Al J Venter)

the resulting misery in Lebanon, but alone the survival of the PLO in the face of an onslaught by the IDF were a de-facto guarantee to boost Palestinian confidence and further swell the ranks of their and other Muslim militant organisations. However, and once again, all such factors were entirely ignored by the Israeli leadership.[20]

Unsurprisingly, as about 25,000 Israeli troops – almost exclusively infantry and paratroopers – crossed the border and moved north, they encountered next to no significant resistance, except in two places: Bint Jubayl and Tayybah. Even there, the Palestinians fought back only briefly before realizing they were facing overwhelming odds, and withdrawing towards the north: the three day 'gap' between the Coastal Road Massacre and the IDF's invasion provided the PLO with sufficient time to move the majority of its forces into safer zones away from the border. Thus, by the end of the first day, the IDF easily secured what the SLA had failed to do for more than a year: it established a 'buffer zone' ranging from 5 to 20 kilometres, stretching from the Mediterranean Sea to the foothills of Jebel Sheikh. Despite this success, on 16 March 1978 Kfir fighter-bombers of the IDF/AF heavily bombed the small port of Sour and commercial sectors around it, killing at least 10 Lebanese civilians, and injuring another 73. Moreover, on 19 March 1978, the IDF/AF deployed cluster-bomb units (CBUs) for the first time in Lebanon while bombing Sour, Arqoub and Nabatiyah, and then bombed a mosque massacring 176 people and wounding 392. The Palestinian resistance remained minimal, and limited to sporadic firings of SA-7s: one of these damaged an A-4 over Damour, but the aircraft managed to return safely to Israel.[21]

Meanwhile, between 16 and 18 March, the Israeli ground forces – always proceeded by reconnaissance aircraft and UAVs, and scout helicopters – launched numerous small advances into the areas where the security belt was thinner than 10 kilometres: however,

abandoning its traditional practice of high mobility, the IDF's advance remained extremely cautious, and usually undertaken only behind a devastating wall of artillery fire – prompting one of observers into the following commentary:

> The Israeli army, once renowned for its Davidian finesse, was used as a huge, stomping Goliath, hitting with all its might at places from which terrorists had already fled.[22]

While these tactics minimized their own losses (within the first two days of combat, the Israelis admitted having suffered 11 killed and 57 wounded), it caused widespread destruction and massive civilian casualties. Moreover, as the IDF units moved further north, the SLA followed in its wake, looting numerous Shi'a villages and massacring more than 100 Shi'a civilians, including women and children. The PLO and allies avoided the wholesale destruction planned by the IDF: while the Israelis claimed to have inflicted over 400 casualties on the Palestinians (while suffering 20 of their own killed), the PLO admitted a loss of 144 killed. Finally, just when the operation seemed to be coming to an end, the IDF suddenly broke out of the buffer zone and advanced on the Litani River, on 19 March. By the evening of that day, Israel thus controlled all of Lebanon south of the vital water course – with one exception: its troops carefully bypassed the town of Tyre and the nearby three huge, PLO-controlled refugee camps, thus creating an enclave that became known as the 'Tyre Pocket'. By this time, nearly 2,000 Lebanese civilians had been killed and an equal number wounded, while more than 250,000 were forced to flee. Indeed, there was hardly a village south of the Litani that was not affected by the invasion: nearly 2,500 homes in about 100 Shi'a villages were completely destroyed and twice that number severely damaged.[23] A reporter of the Washington Post concluded:

> From the slopes of Mount Hermon in the East to the heights overlooking Tyre in the west, the Israeli invasion of southern Lebanon has left a broad patch of death and destruction unprecedented in the region south of the Litani River. Nothing that has gone before prepares one for the devastation that has been visited on the ancient stone towns of this rolling, rock-strewn farming country, yet to recover from the rigours of the Civil War.[24]

UNIFIL AND THE BUFFER ZONE

In the light of the preceding analysis, it can be concluded that the actual Israeli objectives for invading Lebanon on 14 March 1978, were entirely different from the officially announced ones: the establishment of the security belt was a mere euphemism for the annexation of southern Lebanon, including its water sources, while the second objective of the invasion was a disruption of the Shtura Accords and the Syrian-PLO consensus – i.e. throwing Lebanon into renewed chaos, increasing rifts between Beirut and Damascus, and getting the Syrians out of the country.[25]

Much to Israeli surprise, the international reaction was unusually powerful: not only that the Lebanese government issued an official complaint to the United Nations Security Council, on 15 March, but a day later even Washington – seriously concerned about negative repercussions of the Israeli invasion for the ongoing peace negotiations with Egypt – demanded an immediate withdrawal, and proposed to the UN to immediately replace the Israeli forces by a peace-keeping contingent. When the Americans then pushed for an appropriate resolution of the Security Council, and this – Resolution 425 – was released on 19 March, Israel was left without a choice but to announce a 'unilateral cease-fire'.[26] A day later, the Israeli defence minister Ezer Weizmann met with General Ensio Siilasvuo, Commander of the United Nations Truce Supervision Organisation (UNTSO) and Major-General Emmanuel S Erskine, commander of the newly-established UN International Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL), a 4,000-strong peacekeeping contingent with the mandate to monitor the Israeli withdrawal and assist the Lebanese government in restoring its authority over the region. However, instead of acting according to the orders from New York, the UNTSO and UNIFIL commanders, and the Israelis reached an agreement under which the strip of Lebanese territory along the border with Israel was to be designated the 'peace zone' and patrolled by the SLA, while the area between that strip and the Litani River was to become a 'buffer zone' patrolled by UNIFIL. Moreover, the Israeli armed forces continued their attacks for two days longer, even after Arafat agreed to a general ceasefire and ordered the PLO to stop its own attacks. Finally, although the first UNIFIL soldiers arrived on 22 March 1978, the IDF completed its withdrawal from Lebanon only on 13 June 1978, by which time it had heavily reinforced the SLA with arms and supplies. In other words: instead of being pressured into an unconditional and instant withdrawal – as demanded even by Washington – Israel violated the ceasefire and then actually bargained conquests north of the Litani River to buy time for solidifying Haddad's position.[27]

Overall, through the havoc it created in southern Lebanon, Israel – a country that never stopped claiming that it could not afford getting involved in any kind of war lasting longer than a few days, and to depend on quick and decisive victories for its survival – became involved in not only another protracted war, but indeed one that had not ended even 40 years later, and during which it created for itself multiple additional, yet more extreme and dangerous enemies than ever thought possible.

INTERVIEWS

'Adad' (retired Su-7/20/22-pilot, SyAAF), interview, May 1996
'Boudros' (retired MiG-21-pilot, SyAAF), interviews in March 2007, October 2008, November 2015, February 2016, April 2018
'Hussam' (retired MiG-21- and MiG-25-pilot, SyAAF), interview, October 2016, April 2018
'Duha' (retired SyAADF-officer), interviews, August 2004, March 2007, July 2013, November 2015, February 2016, April 2018
'E. R.' (veteran of the IDF), interviews, July 2012
'Hashim' (retired SyAADF-officer), interviews, March 2005, March 2006, July 2013, November 2016
'Ismael' (retired SyAAF MiG-21/Su-22/Su-24-pilot), interview, November 2015
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'Mouhannad' (MiG-21- and Su-22-pilot, SyAAF), interview, August 2004, June 2011, July 2013, December 2016, April 2018
'Talal' (CO SAM-brigade, SyAAF/SyAADF), interviews, April 2001, August 2004, March 2005, March 2006, March 2007, October 2007, October 2008, December 2012, July 2013, November 2015, December 2016, April 2018

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NOTES

CHAPTER 1

1 Unless stated otherwise, the following chapter is based on Allawi, *Faisal I of Iraq*; Baker, *King Hussain*; Barr, *A Line in the Sand*; Dupuy et al, *Flawed Victory*; Green, *Taking Sides*; *Historical Atlas* (Millennium House Pty, 2008; ISBN 978-1-921209-23-9); Hughes, 'The Banality and Brutality'; Morris, *The Birth of the Palestinian Refugee Problem, 1947-1949* & *Righteous Victims: A History of the Zionist-Arab Conflict, 1881-2001*; O'Ballance, *The Arab-Israeli War 1948*; Ovendale, Pappe, *The Ethnic Cleansing of Palestine*; Provence, *The Great Syrian Revolt* & *The Last Ottoman Generation*.

2 Dahl, p.15.

3 Hughes, pp.314-354; Morris, *Righteous Victims*, p.190; Ovendale, pp.54 & 119.

4 Green, pp.20-21, based on 'Top Secret', JCS paper 1684/11, dated 31 March 1948 , copy in Decimal File 1946-1948, Plans and Operations Division, 091 Palestine TS (Section IIA, Case 6), Record Group 319, National Archives.

5 Gabriel, p.39.

6 Dupuy et al, *The Almanac*, p.179; Flintham, pp.67-68.

7 Dahl, pp.21-22.

8 Uri Bar-Noi, *The Soviet Union and the Six-Day War: Revelations From the Polish Archives*, Cold War International History Project at the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, e-Dossier No. 8, based on 'On Soviet Policy Following the Israeli Aggression in the Middle East', by Comrade L. I. Brezhnev to the Plenum of the Central Committee of the CPSU, 20 June 1967, Archiwum Akt Nowych (Polish document describing the speech given by Brezhnev to the Plenum of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union on the actions undertaken by the Soviet leadership before and during the June 1967 Arab-Israeli War.).

9 Dahl, p.25.

10 Ovendale, pp.180-181 & Thompson et al, pp.166-173.

CHAPTER 2

1 According to usual sources of reference – for example Martin Gilbert's *The Routledge Atlas of the Arab-Israeli Conflict* (ISBN 0-415-359001-5) – no fewer than 967 Israelis were killed in 'Arab terrorist attacks' between 1951 and 1955. In comparison, Morris (*Israel's Border War,* p.101) declared such figures to be 'pure nonsense' and 'based on a 1956 speech by David Ben-Gurion in which he used a phrase for casualties in their broad sense' (i.e. regardless if dead or wounded). Morris concluded that such figures were, 'three to five times higher than the figures given in contemporary Israeli reports'.

2 Orna Almog, *Britain, Israel, and the United States, 1955-1958.* Almog cited Yeshoshfat Harkabi, former head of Israeli military intelligence agency AMAN, who stated that, 'these early infiltrations were limited incursions, motivated by economic reasons, such as Palestinians crossing the border into Israel to harvest crops in their former villages'. Shlaim (pp.84-85) stressed, 'There is strong evidence from Arab, British, American, UN and even Israeli sources to suggest that for the first six years after the [1948] war, the Arab governments were opposed to infiltration and tried to curb it. The Lebanese… effectively sealed the border to Israel. The Syrian authorities also exercised strict control over their border with Israel, and infiltration was rare. The Egyptian authorities… pursued a consistent policy of curbing infiltration until 1955… Secret Jordanian documentation captured by the Israeli army during the June 1967 war…reveal strenuous efforts on the part of the Jordanian military and civilian efforts… to keep [infiltrators] from crossing. Morris, in Israel's Border War (p.67) wrote, '[W]hen (we) asked (the IDF for) …some clear documentary proof of the (Arab) Legion's complicity (in the infiltrations)…no clear answer came from the army. …no proof existed.'

3 Green, p.99 & Shlaim, pp.128-129. The latter stressed, 'Records show that until the Gaza Raid [of February 1955], the Egyptian military authorities had a consistent and firm policy towards curbing infiltration…into Israel… and that it was only following the raid that a new policy was put in place, that of organising the fedayeen [Palestinian militants] units and turning them into an official instrument of warfare against Israel.'

4 Data based on research by late Air Vice Marshal Gabr Ali Gabr (Egyptian Air Force).

5 Ibid & Nicolle et al, pp.11-13 (Middle East@War Series, Volume 8).

6 Data based on research by Air Vice Marshal Gabr Ali Gabr. The story of the UNEF's Yugoslav contingent is to be told in one of the following volumes of the Middle East@War series.

7 Ibid.

8 Ibid.

9 Gabriel, p.30.

10 Dunstan, *Israeli Fortifications*, pp.25–28.

11 Dupuy et al, *The Almanac*, pp.174-175; *Der Fischer Weltalmanach '71 (1971): Zahlen, Daten, Fakten*, pp.166; Fischer, 1970, (ISBN 978-3436012922).

12 'Secret' Memorandum for Walter Rostow from Hal Saunders and John Foster; subject: Mid-East Terrorism, 11 November 1967, National Security File, Saunders Memos, Box No. 7, Lyndon Baines Johnson Library.

13 Gabriel, p.30 & Ovendale, p.186.

14 Ovendale, p.189.

15 Dupuy et al, *Flawed Victory*, pp.25-27 & Dahl, p.41.

16 Dupuy et al, *Flawed Victory*, pp.25-27. Arafat's diary published in the Italian magazine L'espresso, in 2018, shows that Arafat never personally gave orders for any for 'terrorist' attacks. At most, he would let his commanders decide for themselves when asked for permission (supposedly to maintain plausible deniability). Still, when an attack was carried out, he would cheer and say, 'Good, good!'

17 Green, *Living by the Sword*, pp.20-32; Morris, *Righteous Victims*, p.369 & Amir Oren, 'Debacle in the Desert, *Haaretz*, 29 March 1968.

18 'East Ghor Canal' airgram number A-26 from US Embassy, Amman, to Department of State, 30 January 1970, provided under a FOIA request to the US Department of State.

19 Ovendale, p.186 & Dahl, pp.26-27.

20 Dana Adams Schmidt, 'Israelis attack Beirut's Airport', *NYT*, 29 December 1968; 'Telegram from the Department of State to the Embassy in Israel', 29 December 1968, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1964-1968, Volume XX, Arab-Israeli Dispute, 1967-1978* (Office of the Historian of the Department of State).

21 Ovendale, pp.187-189; Dahl, pp.27-27; Dupuy et al, *Flawed Victory*, pp.28-29.

22 Chenel et al, *Mirage III/5/50*, pp.141-165.

23 Cobban, p.47, Dahl, pp.30-33 & Gabriel, pp.39-42.

24 CIA, 'Talking Points for the DCI/Syria-Libya: Cooperation Following US Airstrikes', 23 April 1986, CIA FOIA Electronic Reading Room (henceforth CIA/FOIA/ERR).

25 Mouhannad (see Bibliography for details), interview, August 2004.

26 Older reports about this terrorist attack date it as 8 May 1970, and this date seems to be officially commemorated in Israel. However, more recent publications (for example Morris, *Righteous Victims*) date this attack as 22 May 1970.

27 CIA, 'Southern Lebanon: Geographic Perspectives on Possible Israeli invasion', GI.82-10087, April 1982, CIA/FOIA/ERR; *The History of the Syrian Army*, Chapter 10; Mouhannad, interview, August 2004.

28 Ibid. Mansour was posthumously credited with 'downing 14 enemy aircraft, including 3 Skyhawks', and awarded the prestigious Hero of the Syrian Arab Republic Medal (equivalent to the Victoria Cross). The loss of Fayez Mansour prompted Assad into grounding his younger brother Mohammed, who – by scoring four confirmed aerial victories in 1967-1970 (of course, officially he was credited with many more) – actually proved even more successful in air combat than Fayez.

29 *The History of the Syrian Army*, Chapter 10. Nablsy was posthumously awarded the Hero of the Syrian Arab Republic Medal. Other, unofficial Syrian sources cited the downed Israeli aircraft as a 'Phantom', and 'confirmed' that 'one crewmember was captured'.

30 Ibid.

31 Ovendale, pp.186-187.

32 Ibid. Constructed by the RAF during World War II, Dawson's Field was named after ACM Sir Walter Dawson, AOC AHQ Levant 1946–1948.

33 Ovendale, p.188.

34 Dupuy et al, *The Almanac*, p.175. For a detailed history of the Iraqi and Jordanian Air Forces in 1958-1967, see Cooper et al, *Hawker Hunters at War* (Middle East@War Series, Volume 8).

35 Ovendale, pp.187-189.

36 Shurafa was released in 1971, but died of a heart attack while on a trip to Germany in 1975.

37 Ovendale, p.189 & Shlaim, p.339. Notably, according to RJAF records provided by Patricia Salti, tensions between Jordan and Syria remained high, leading to multiple skirmishes. For example, on 13 August 1971, four SyAAF MiG-17Fs attacked Jordanian artillery positions near Ramtha, and destroyed one 105mm self-propelled howitzer, injuring one soldier. In another incident, Syrian MiG-17Fs penetrated Jordanian airspace as far as Amman by flying at low altitude, in what Jordan thought was an attempt to find a possible way around Israeli radar coverage of the Golan Heights. The Jordanians listened in on their radio communications, and as the Syrians turned back towards the frontier, the Jordanians interrupted their conversation, informing the intruders that they had been monitored all the way, and if they tried it again, Jordanian forces would shoot them down. The Syrians did return on 1 March 1972, though this time the four MiG-17Fs involved turned back north before attacking the Israeli HQ at El Al.

38 Dupuy et al, The Almanac, p.175.

39 Flintham, p.77. Notably, official RJAF documentation cites the date of al-Khatib's death as 9 November 1972, while flying a Hunter, but without describing the particular circumstances of the incident.

CHAPTER 3

1 Unless stated otherwise, this sub-chapter is based on Dupuy et al, *The Almanac*, pp.170-172 & Gabriel, pp.4-28.

2 For details, see Cull et al, *Wings over Suez* & Nicolle et al, *Wings over Sinai.*

3 Andrew, p.236.

4 Mollo, pp.144-146.

5 Dupuy et al, *The Almanac*, p.179; Pivka, p.119.

6 Unless stated otherwise, data in this sub-chapter is based on Cooper et al, *Arab MiGs Vol.2*, pp.56-58; Stafrace, *Arab Air Forces*, p.34; 'The Independent Guide to the Lebanese Air Force', *lebaneseairforce.info* & *lebarmy.gov.lb*

7 Fritz Strehle is known to have flown the Messerschmitt Me.262 during the closing stages of the Second World War.

8 Ministry of Defence (London) File 'Assistance to the Lebanese Air Force, Background Brief', 1 February 1958.

9 Ministry of Defence (London) File No. A.W.P./M(58)14, from 6 March 1958.

10 Jones, *Hawker Hunter*, pp.136-137; all Hunters from the third batch were ex-Belgian Air Force aircraft.

11 Vatche Militilian, *The Independent Guide to the Lebanese Air Force* (lebaneseairforce.info). According to the Israeli accounts, the pilot of the downed FAL Hunter was shot down after 'violating Israeli airspace'. However, such claims are countered by the Lebanese official releases, and the fact that the downed pilot parachuted into safety over Lebanon.

12 Chenel et al, *Mirage III/5/50*, pp.141-165.

13 'Crotale Inquiry', *Flight International*, 11 January 1973.

14 Jean Constantine, interview with *al-Jaysh* magazine (Lebanon), 2005, translation provided by Cesar Jachan and Samir Kassis, November 2014.

15 Chenel et al, *Mirage III/5/50*, pp.141-165 & Arlette Kasas, 'L'affaire des Mirages: Un complot soviétique déjoué au Liban', *L'Hebdo magazine* (in French), 24 May 2013.

16 Konzelmann, pp.287-293.

17 Ibid; CIA, 'Syria's Elite Military Units: Key to Stability and Succession: An Intelligence Assessment', NESA 87-10012, February 1987, CIA/FOIA/ERR & related research for Cooper, *Syrian Conflagration*, and *Moscow's Game of Poker* (see Bibliography for details).

18 CIA, 'Syria's Elite Military Units: Key to Stability and Succession: An Intelligence Assessment', NESA 87-10012, February 1987, CIA/FOIA/ERR.

19 CIA, 'Background Information on German Military Experts in Syria', 22 January 1954, CIA/FOIA/ERR. Notably, at the high point of the Axis advance into Egypt, in summer 1942, Rauff was deployed to North Africa with the task of organising the prosecution of Jews in Egypt and Palestine, once these had been captured. When the Axis advance was stopped at el-Alamein, and then forced into a retreat, Rauff's *Einsatzkommando* was deployed in Tunisia instead.

20 Based on research by Martin Smisek for the *Arab MiGs* project. Smisek's detailed account of Czechoslovak arms exports and cooperation with diverse nations in this part of the world is to follow in one of the future volumes of the Middle East@War series.

21 Pivka, pp.136-137 & Dunstan, p.32.

22 For example, Mustafa (in *The Fall of the Golan*), cites the first line of defences on the Golan Heights as held by (from north towards south), 6th, 2nd, 4th, and 15th Infantry Brigades; the second line of defences by the 11th and 19th Infantry- and the 8th Armoured Brigade in the north, the 13th and 43rd Brigades in the centre, and the 32nd Brigade in the south, while the 80th and 123rd Reserve Infantry Brigades were concentrated in the Qunaitra area. Moreover, he cites the existence of an 'Intervention Force' consisting of the 43rd, 72nd and the 80th Motorised Infantry- and the 70th Armoured Brigades further to the rear. Up to a dozen other brigades were deployed further north-east, and others on the borders to Iraq, Lebanon, and Turkey, which would mean that the SyAA had more than 20 brigade-sized formations at the time.

23 For details, see Hammel, *Six Days in June.*

24 Dupuy, *The Almanac*, pp.185-186 & CIA, 'Syria's Elite Military Units: Key to Stability and Succession: An Intelligence Assessment', NESA 87-10012, February 1987, CIA/FOIA/ERR.

25 CIA, 'Syria's Elite Military Units: Key to Stability and Succession: An Intelligence Assessment', NESA 87-10012, February 1987, CIA/FOIA/ERR.

26 Unless stated otherwise, this sub-chapter is based on Cooper et al, *Arab MiGs Vol.1, Vol.2* and *Vol.3*.

27 Dukovac and his colleagues used to fly for the quisling Croatian Air Legion (Kroatische Luftwaffen Legion) – a unit equipped with German aircraft and deployed on the Eastern Front against the USSR, during the Second World War. According to Jelavic (*352 [Y]RAF Squadron*), Dukovac and his colleagues defected to the Soviet side in 1944 and subsequently joined the emerging Yugoslav air force. Exposed to frequent abuse by Serbian officers, they then defected to Italy and were interned. Immediately following the armistice between Israel and Syria, the IDF contracted the same Croatian team – minus Dukovac: he emigrated to Canada. However, his colleagues served as instructors for Israeli pilots before returning to Italy in late 1950.

28 Nicolle et al, *Wings over Sinai*, pp.31-32.

29 NPIC, 'Probable Fitter Aircraft Shipping Crates, Tiaz (sic) Airfield, Syria, 16 June 1967, CIA/FOIA/ERR.

CHAPTER 4

1 Dahl, pp.2, 40 & Ovendale, p.32. Notably, other sources cite the movement of up to 150,000 Palestinian refugees from Jordan to Lebanon, in 1970-1971.

2 Ibid, pp.42-43 & 56.

3 Ibid, pp.51-52.

4 Ibid, p.44.

5 Ibid & Staf race, p.34.

6 Dahl, pp.52-53.

7 'Weißer Kreis', *Der Spiegel* (in German), 5 June 1972.

8 Jack Anderson, 'Terrorist Plot Tel Aviv Plane Dive', *The Washington Post*, 12 January 1973.

9 Melman, *The Master Terrorist*, p.213.

10 Konzelmann, pp.295-296. Ironically, while the massacres of Syrian and Palestinian civilians in Damascus and Hama remained entirely unknown in the West, the other form of Israeli revenge for the Munich Massacre – a special operation by Israel's foreign intelligence agency Mossad, lasting nearly 20 years – was widely published, although actually representing an act of state-sponsored terror. In the course of that operation, Mossad tracked down and assassinated nearly all of those allegedly responsible for the Munich massacre – foremost in Europe and Lebanon – but also murdered a number of innocent civilians.

11 Konzelmann, pp.295-296; *The History of the Syrian Army*, Chapter 11; Addad, interview, August 1996 & Mouhannad, interview, August 2004. Notably, the Syrians were convinced that this was the first time the Israelis had deployed US-made MIM-23 HAWK SAMs against them.

12 Dahl, pp.49-50 & 52; Konzelmann, pp.296-297.

13 Marchenko, 'Syrian Mission'.

14 Nabil, interview, April 2001, March 2007, and October 2007; Raspletin, 'History PVO' website; Konzelmann, pp.293-294; Marchenko, 'Syrian Mission'; Dusko Doder, 'Syria Gets MiGs, Other Arms in New Massive Soviet Airlift', *The Washington Post*, 10 January 1973; CIA, 'Syria: Economic Impact of the October War, Progress in Reconstruction, and Capabilities to Resume Hostilities', 15 April 1974, CIA FOIA Electronic Reading Room (henceforth CIA/FOIA/ERR).

15 Henkin, 'A High Price…'

16 El-Gindy (EAF MiG-17-pilot and CO No. 62 Squadron in 1973), interview to Dr. Abdallah Emran, May 2008 & Mohammed Okasha (EAF MiG-17-pilot, CO No. 62 Squadron in 1969-1972, and leading historian of the EAF), interview to Dr. Abdallah Emran, May 2008.

17 Marchenko, 'Syrian Mission'.

18 Lion Schlein, 'Colonel Tabet', *Journal of Israeli Air Force* (in Hebrew), December 1999.

19 Vagin's figures are only valid because the inexperienced North Vietnamese were operating very few cannon-armed MiG-21s, but also avoided involvement in dogfights: instead, they preferred flying surprise, high-speed attacks in which they fired air-to-air missiles against non-manoeuvring opponents, before quickly disengaging. Even then, many of their R-3S' missed: although Hanoi never released specific data about related experiences, US pilots involved in air combats against North Vietnamese MiG-21s did report a large number of R-3S-missiles that either missed or failed on launch. For example, Michel, (in *Clashes*, pp.159)., cited US intelligence reports according to which the North Vietnamese were experiencing similar problems with their missiles as the Americans, and that the R-3S achieved a probability of kill of 13% at most. Furthermore, Michel concluded, that actual figures were probably worse than those reported, because the numbers of reporting firings were only those observed by the Americans: how many of the North Vietnamese firing attempts were never seen by US aircrews remains unknown.

20 Nabil, interview, April 2001, March 2007, and October 2007; Raspletin, 'History PVO' website; Dusko Doder, 'Syria Gets MiGs, Other Arms in New Massive Soviet Airlift', *The Washington Post*, 10 January 1973.

21 Data according to Cesar Jachan, based on combination of contemporary reporting in the Lebanese media and his own research of the crash site at Mount Keserwan in 2010.

22 Dahl, pp.72, 75 & Gabriel, p.42.

23 Dahl, pp.1, 75-78; CIA, 'Southern Lebanon: Geographic Perspectives on Possible Israeli invasion', GI.82-10087, April 1982, CIA/FOIA/ERR.

24 Dahl, p.81 & Chenel et al, *Mirage III/5/50*, pp.141-165. As far as is known, this remained the only combat operation of the FAL involving its Mirage IIIELs. The civil war and the spreading economic crisis forced the air force to drastically reduce its operations for lack of funding, fuel and spares. By that time, it is known that one Mirage IIIEL (serial L-502) and one Mirage IIIBL (serial L-512) were already written off (the former on 11 May 1971). The left wing of another Mirage IIIEL – which was damaged under unknown circumstances – was meanwhile used to replace the wing of the Mirage IIIEL serial number L-504. In July 1974, a team from the French air force arrived in Lebanon to inspect the surviving 10 airframes and found all of them still in excellent condition, each having been flown for only some 500 hours on average. Beirut then offered to sell the Mirages back to France, but Paris declined. For a while, some negotiations were undertaken with Greece that – following the Turkish invasion with Cyprus – was in need of advanced interceptors. However, Athens then opted to buy newly-built Mirage F.1Cs instead.

25 Dahl, pp.85-89.

26 Ibid, p.94-95.

27 Unless stated otherwise, this sub-chapter is based on Kassis, *30 Years of Military Vehicles in Lebanon.*

28 Dahl, p.99.

29 El-Gar is still celebrated in Syria as one of biggest SyAAF heroes of the October 1973 War. However, over recent years an increasing number of reports from his former colleagues surfaced, according to whom he not only stole claims of several fallen comrades, but actually 'earned' his decorations for marrying the daughter of the contemporary Chief-of-Staff, SyAAF, Major-General Naji Jamil.

30 See telegram 1973BEIRUT11911_b, titled 'Lebanese Involvement in Hostilities', dated 8 October 1973. Under point 3, this cited:

> Concerning radar, Lebanese told Israelis that there [is] no question of their transmitting radar info to Syrians, particularly since big radar at Jabal [sic] Barouk [is] out of order for almost five months awaiting spare parts from France, and smaller army radar also out of order for same reason. Only operable radar is that covering civilian traffic at international airport.

Considering the impact of the above-mentioned affair and the Lebanese cancellation of orders for Crotale SAMs, a lack of spare parts for the radar station at Jebel Barouk should have come as no surprise. Nevertheless, Israeli politicians had an excellent – although standardised – explanation, as cited by the US ambassador to Israel in telegram 1973TELAV07939_b, titled 'Lebanese Involvement in Hostility', from 10 October 1973, under Point 1:

> In my conversation today with DEPPRIM [Deputy Prime Minister of Israel] Allon he mentioned Israelis had bombed Jabal [sic] Barouk radar station in order to eliminate troublesome source of information for the Syrians on Israeli air activity. I stated that we understood that this station had been inoperative for a week and that the Lebanese had told the Israelis this. Allon replied without hesitation 'they are liars'.

The reader is left to conclude that the IDF/AF must have been in possession of 'superior intelligence' than Allon or even the Lebanese themselves. If this was the case, then the content of another telegram from the US ambassador to Israel – 1973TELAV08306_b, titled 'Cutting of Beirut-Marseille Cable', dated 18 October 1973, – leaves one startled. Under Point 2, this cited:

> Can you be more precise r.e. the ILMAC meeting in which Israeli reportedly admitted bombing Barouk radar station was error? Last word we had on subject here was when DEPPRIM Allon called Lebanese 'liars' when I raised subject with him on October 10.

Overall, the entire affair leaves the impression that the only reply one can expect from official Israeli sources in cases like these is that 'Arabs always lie'.

31 Memorandum, 'Syria's Negotiating Tactics', 3 December 1974, CIA/FOIA/ERR; 'Arab Terrorists Slay 18 in Raid on Israel', AP, 13 April 1974; Addad, interview, August 1996 & Mouhannad, interview, August 2004.

32 Duha, interview, August 2004.

33 Addad, interview, August 1996; Mouhannad, interview, August 2004; Duha, interview, August 2004 & Flintham, p.78. It is very likely that some of the Syrian claims for the high number of Israeli aircraft shot down by SAMs were based on the deployment of ground-launched MQM-74 Choukar unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs), operated by Palmachim AB-based No. 200 Squadron, IDF/AF. These are known to have been planned to be used as decoys – to draw fire of the Syrian SA-6s away from the manned fighter-bombers – already before the October 1973 War. No. 200 Squadron is known to have acquired 27 MQM-74s and 10 Teledyne Ryan Model 124I UAVs before the conflict: 5 of the former and 10 of the later may have been shot down during the October 1973 War, but precise details on their operations remain elusive.

34 Ibid & Kaiser Tufail, 'Shahbaz over Golan: The Saga of an Intrepid PAF Pilot who humbled the Israelis', *Defense Journal of Pakistan*, 2000.

35 CIA, 'Southern Lebanon: Geographic Perspectives on Possible Israeli invasion', GI.82-10087, April 1982, CIA/FOIA/ERR ; 'Dozens die as Israel retaliates for Ma'a lot', *BBC*, 16 May 1974. The Ma'a lot massacre resulted in the Israeli police creating the Israel's Counter Terrorism Unit, colloquially the Yamam, which became operational later the same year.

36 ICTJ, *Lebanon's Legacy of Political Violence*, p.7.

37 Ibid, p.8.

38 Ibid, p.8 & Dawisha, p.140.

39 ICTJ, *Lebanon's Legacy of Political Violence*, p.9.

40 Ibid, pp.11-12.

41 Ibid, pp.14-15.

42 Green, pp.154-155.

CHAPTER 5

1 CIA, 'Syria: Economic Impact of the October War, Progress in Reconstruction, and Capabilities to Resume Hostilities', 15 April 1974, CIA FOIA Electronic Reading Room (henceforth CIA/FOIA/ERR) & Lawson, pp.467-468.

2 Green, *Living by the Sword*, pp.154-156.

3 Data based on research by Martin Smisek.

4 Interviews with diverse former Syrian military officers (see Bibliography) & CIA, 'Syria's Elite Military Units: Key to Stability and Succession: An Intelligence Assessment', NESA 87-10012, February 1987, CIA/FOIA/ERR. The notable addition of BMP-1 IFVs to SyAA's special forces served a dual purpose: it offered a working alternative to having to transport them by aircraft or helicopter into the combat zone, and improved their protection while there. The special forces thus became capable of acting as an intervention force: an initial blocking force that would buy time for heavier mechanised units to arrive. Furthermore, they became capable of manoeuvring together with mechanised formations.

5 CIA, 'Syria's Elite Military Units: Key to Stability and Succession: An Intelligence Assessment', NESA 87-10012, February 1987, CIA/FOIA/ERR.

6 CIA, 'Syria's Elite Military Units: Key to Stability and Succession: An Intelligence Assessment', NESA 87-10012, February 1987, CIA/FOIA/ERR.

7 Cooper et al, Arab MiGs Volume 6, pp.192-193. According to Smisek's research, and rather ironically, while Prague intended to provide its MiG-21s and associated equipment free of charge, Moscow insisted that Damascus pay at least 50% of their worth. When other countries of the Warsaw Pact – including Bulgaria, Hungary and Poland – followed the Soviet line, the Syrians flatly refused. Ultimately, Czechoslovakia accepted Syrian argumentation and gave up its efforts to extract any money in return. For details, see *Arab MiGs Volume 5* (pp.208-209) and *Arab MiGs Volume 6* (pp.192-194).

8 'Outgoing Message', COMINT, CIA/WHSS, 4 April 1974, CIA FOIA Electronic Reading Room (henceforth 'CIA/FOIA/ERR'). In comparison, another US intelligence document – Memorandum For (deleted), OSR/ER/MEA, from 28 March 1975 (available at the CIA/FOIA/ERR) cites first deliveries of MiG-23s to Syria in May 1974.

9 Boudros, interview, March 2007; Hussam, interview, October 2017; J. H., interview, February 2001; Gunston, *Modern Fighters and Attack Aircraft*, p.109.

10 Raspletin, 'History PVO' website.

11 Dawisha, p.141.

12 Lawson, p.458-460.

13 Konzelmann, pp.311-312 & Lawson, p.451.

14 Asher, 'The Syrian Invasion of Lebanon' & Konzelmann, pp.311-312.

15 Konzelmann, p.312 & Avi-Ran (Chapter 3). Full text of Brezhnev's letter in question was published in the French magazine *Le Monde*, on 20 July 1976. Moreover, according to Avi-Ran (Chapter 3), the Soviets sent another letter with similar content to Damascus in early October 1976, and their decision was taken under strong influence of, 'radical Arab states like Iraq and Libya'.

16 CIA, 'Military Lessons Learned by Israel and Syria From the War in Lebanon', NI IIM 84-10008, May 1984, CIA/FOIA/ERR.

17 Konzelmann, p.312; Green, *Living by the Sword*, p.156; Terchenko, 'Mission to Damascus'. Differences with Moscow and then the Soviet arms embargo shocked the Syrians to the degree where Assad reacted by attempting to establish a strategic friendship with the People's Republic of China. However, multiple Syrian delegations came back empty handed: still recovering from the chaos of the Cultural Revolution, Beijing was unable to offer armament of at least comparable quality to that of Soviet origin (for details, see Moukiiad, pp.213-215).

18 Contemporary press releases by AFP & UPI. As far as is known, Yasin's aircraft experienced no technical malfunctions during that flight: he landed safely and his MiG-23MS was subsequently acquired by the IrAF. Tarmanini subsequentlyenjoyed a highly successful career with the IrAF: after serving as deputy Commander of No. 17 Squadron (which flew MiG-21s from Rashid AB, in the late 1970s), he served as Deputy Commander of the Air Force Academy until 1988, and reached the rank of Major-General before retiring in the 1990s.

19 Mohammad Saied Rassas, 'Syria's Muslim Brotherhood: Past and Present', *al-Monitor.com*, 5 January 2014; 'The Muslim Brotherhood in Syria', Carnegie Middle East Center (*Carnegie-mec.org*), 1 February 2012.

20 Lawson, p.462.

21 Konzelmann, pp.312-314; Mohammad Saied Rassas, 'Syria's Muslim Brotherhood: Past and Present', *al-Monitor.com*, 5 January 2014; 'The Muslim Brotherhood in Syria', Carnegie Middle East Center (*Carnegie-mec.org*), 1 February 2012.

22 ICTJ, *Lebanon's Legacy of Political Violence*, pp.17-19.

23 Asher, 'The Syrian Invasion of Lebanon'; Gabriel, p.44; Konzelmann, pp.312-314.

24 Asher, 'The Syrian Invasion of Lebanon' & Konzelmann, pp.314-315.

25 ICTJ, *Lebanon's Legacy of Political Violence*, pp.20-22.

26 Dupuy, pp.34-35.

27 Avi-Ran, Chapter 4.

28 Jabbar, interview, March 2006.

29 ICTJ, *Lebanon's Legacy of Political Violence*, p.24; Nordeen, p.160 & NYT, 10 & 11 November 1977; Shlomo Aloni, *Israeli A-4 Skyhawk Units in Combat*, p.75.

30 Konzelmann, pp.315-316 & 324; *National Intelligence Daily Cable*, CG NIDC 77-94C, 23 April 1977, CIA/FOIA/ERR & Raspletin, 'History PVO'. Notably, it remains unclear if MiG-23MFs delivered to Syria – all of which were overhauled MiG-23Ms of the Soviet air force – were equipped with the Lasour datalink protocol and thus compatible with such ATMS' as the AZURK-1ME already in service with the SyAADF. Furthermore, after being subjected to a torrent of complaints – the majority of which was related to Assad's closest aides, and even members of his family – the work of the resulting 'Committee to Uncover Illegal Profits' was quickly closed by Assad only weeks after the existence of this body was officially announced, in August 1977. Finally, the fact that the Syrian acquisition of MiG-23BNs was financed by Iraq was one of the typical ironies of the modern-day Arab world: the Saudis were financing Syrian arms acquisitions in the interests of suppressing the growing power of the Iraqi Vice President, Saddam Hussein at-Tikriti, renowned for his hatred for the government in Riyadh, but also to counter the growing might of the Shi'a clergy that subsequently took over in Iran.

31 Konzelmann, pp.322-324, Moukiiad, pp.213-215 & Stafrace, p.58. According to research by Martin Smisek, although negotiations for related contracts were finalized only in June 1978, the ultimate result was not only the acquisition of L-39s (including a total of 55 L-39ZOs and 44 L-39ZAs), but also 360 T-55 MBTs, 500 BMP-1 IFVs and 200 AMB-S armoured tracked ambulance vehicles. Syria thus become the largest export customer for Czechoslovak-made arms outside Europe. For details on Soviet deliveries and early combat service of the Mil Mi-25 in Ethiopia in the 1977-1978 period, see Cooper, *Wings over Ogaden.*

32 Konzelmann, pp.323-324.

33 'Boudros', interview, March 2007; 'Duha', interview, August 2004; 'Hashim', interview, March 2005; 'Jabbar', interview, June 2003; 'Mouhannad' (retired MiG-21- and Su-22-pilot, SyAAF; name changed for reasons related to the personal safety of the source and his family), interview, August 2004 & 'Talal' (former SA-6-operator, SyAAF; name changed for reasons related to the personal safety of the source and his family), interviews, April 2001 and August 2004; 'APEX (AA-7) Air-to-air Missile, Sayqal Airfield, Syria', 26 July 1982, CIA/FOIA/ERR.

CHAPTER 6

1 The term 'indigenous' with regards to Israeli armament production since the early 1970s was always more than 'relative'. While there is no doubt that at least 50% of the majority of enterprises in the defence sector was owned by Koor (a corporation owned by the non-governmental Israeli Labor Federation), except in the case of the IAI and the Israeli Military Industries (IMI) the remaining 50% were nearly always owned by diverse US or other foreign companies. In the case of companies in the high-technology sector – like Elbit Computers, AEL Israel (major manufacturer of electronic warfare systems), and Israel Electro-Optical Industry (ELOP) – the US and foreign ownership ranged from 55% to 75%. This in turn proved one of the key limiting factors for Israeli arms exports: the US Government imposed strict restrictions upon third-country transfers of items manufactured under US licence or incorporating US technology, and never granted permission for the use of Foreign Military Sales credits by third parties for purchasing Israeli-manufactured equipment (for details see 'Israel: The Economic Impact of the Defense Industry, An Intelligence Assessment', NESA 82-10500, September 1982, CIA/FOIA/ERR).

2 Other than that only one battalion of the IDF was ever declared operational on the Lance system, and that its personnel were trained at Fort Sill (Oklahoma, USA), very little is known about its operational history in Israel.
3 Gabriel, pp.21-22.
4 Nordeen, p.152; Peoples, *AH-1 Cobra*, p.23 & 'The Fighting Edge', *Defence Update* No.88.
5 Bill Norton, 'A little bit of this, a little bit of that', *AirInternational*, January 1999; Newdick, pp.50-51; 'The Fighting Edge', *Defence Update* No.88.
6 Bill Norton, 'A little bit of this, a little bit of that', *AirInternational*, January 1999; Newdick, pp.50-51; 'The Fighting Edge' & Lake et al, *Spirit in the Skies*, p.181.
7 Bill Norton, 'A little bit of this, a little bit of that', *AirInternational*, January 1999.
8 Yoav Efrati, 'The Phantom's Last Kill', *Model Aircraft Monthly*, February 2006. Notably, while providing unusually precise details on the post-1973 development of the Israeli Phantom-fleet, the author's claim that it was a crew of an F-4E from No. 105 Squadron that scored the 'last' kill ever for this type is an exaggeration. Not only that the claim in question remains that – a claim – because no data on the claimed Syrian MiG-21 ever became available, but the honour of scoring the last confirmed kill while flying an F-4E was earned by one of crews of the Islamic Republic of Iran Air Force, which went on scoring confirmed kills against MiG-21s, MiG-23s, Sukhoi Su-22s and other aircraft of the Iraqi Air Force right until the end of the Iran-Iraq War, in August 1988. Moreover, thanks to availability of reliable details on Iraqi losses during the war with Iran, it is meanwhile possible to critically review and confirm, or deny, most of the Iranian claims – which is something very rarely done with the mass of Israeli claims.
9 Joe Mizrahi, 'The Designer of the B-1 Bomber's Airframe', *Wings*, Volume 30/No.4, August 2000; *Born in Battle/War Data Special*: 'From Mirage to Kfir'; *Defence Update* No. 55, 'From Kfir to Lavi'.
10 *Born in Battle/War Data Special*: 'From Mirage to Kfir' & *Defence Update* No. 55.
11 The WDNS-391 TAAL-Crystal was a navigation platform developed especially for Israeli A-4Hs, most of the avionics of which was installed in a 'hump' behind the cockpit.
12 Unless stated otherwise, based on Gabriel, pp.22-29; Green, pp.100-110; Nordeen, pp.152-154.
13 'Israel: The Economic Impact of the Defense Industry, An Intelligence Assessment', NESA 82-10500, September 1982, CIA/FOIA/ERR. Notably, the US governments made sure that Israel need not pay back US$500 million of the annual FMS credit it received; the remnant had a 30-year term with a 10-year grace period on the principal. Furthermore, the USA continued providing economic aid worth about 50% of the annual FMS credit. Even then, the Israeli government demanded that the share of FMS credits that did not need to be repaid to be increased to 50%, all the economic aid to be provided in the form of grants, and the USA to assist in promoting Israeli military exports abroad.
14 ICTJ, *Lebanon's Legacy of Political Violence*, pp.23-24.
15 Ibid, pp.23-24.
16 Dupuy, *Flawed Victory*, p.36.
17 *Arab Report and Record*, No.5, 1-15 March 1978, p .162.
18 'Palestinians Honor Leader of 1978 Terror Attack', *Reuters/The Jerusalem Post*, 13 March 2011.
19 *Arab Report and Record*, No.5, 1-15 March 1978, pp.162 & 184; Gilmour, p.148.
20 Dupuy et al, p.56; Schiff et al, p.24; Gabriel, p.56, Van Creveld, p.288; Gilmour, p.148; *Arab Report and Record*, 1-15 March 1978, no. 5, p .148; Goodman, 'Israeli Forces Holding Southern Lebanon', The Jerusalem Post, 21 March 1978, p.7 and text of the 'Special Communiqué' issued by Israel on the eve of the Operation Stone of Wisdom (*Arab World Weekly* No.465, 18 March 1978, p.23).
21 ICTJ, *Lebanon's Legacy of Political Violence*, p.24.
22 Jawaid, p.190.
23 Green, *Living by the Sword*, p.155; ICTJ, *Lebanon's Legacy of Political Violence*, pp.24-25; Dupuy, *Flawed Victory*, pp.48-50; Jawaid, pp.187-189.
24 Jawaid, pp.187-189.
25 Jawaid, pp.193-194.
26 For the complete text of Resolution 425, see *Arab Report and Record*, No. 6, 16-31 March 1978, p.221.
27 ICTJ, *Lebanon's Legacy of Political Violence*, p.25 & Jawaid, pp.193-194.

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